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Juan José Gómez Gutiérrez

ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY CULTURAL POLICIES DURING THE
POST-WAR PERIOD, 1944-1951

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the cultural politics of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) during the immediate post-war period in the context of Italian History, the artistic developments of the first half of the 20th Century and the ideological basis of the PCI. The text has been divided in two parts: The first part focuses on the cultural policy of the PCI from 1944 to 1951 and its relationship with contemporary Italian culture. In the second part, I discuss the influence of Communist cultural politics in post-war Italian art.

I have identified two phases of the cultural politics of the PCI which correspond to two phases of the political developments in Italy after World War II: From 1944, the Italian Communists pursued a policy of alliances with non-proletarianised sectors of society and the other Italian anti-Fascist parties. This policy of alliances collapsed in 1947, when the PCI was expelled from the Government of national unity, which was controlled by the Christian Democrats.

In the second part of the thesis, I explain how, similarly, Italian artists were heavily influenced by political allegiances in the wake of Fascism. But, precisely, anti-Fascism was a cornerstone for collaboration and understanding between representatives of disparate trends, and associations of artists from a broad political spectrum were organised. Artists with a PCI card were fully involved with such associations.

After 1947, however, as a result of its marginalisation from government, the PCI politics hardened in all fields, including culture. Party officials began to ask

artists to put their skills at the service of the Communist's wider political programme and express Communist contents through their work in every case, with an 'understandable' style aimed to ideologically shape the uneducated proletariat. Nevertheless, this policy seemed unacceptable for those artists who equated Communism with political anti-fascism and free intellectual enquiry. The prestige of the PCI among intellectuals accordingly underwent a quick decline, and Communist officials had to develop a more relaxed cultural line from 1951. This substantially meant the return to the policy pursued in the wake of the war. After this, the relationship of the PCI with fine artists was re-composed. However, the political influence of this collective was fading away in the early 1950s, when new means of mass communication, such as cinema, radio and magazines, appeared in Italy and succeeded in shaping public opinion in a far more effective way than the fine arts.

To Pepe, Isa and Araceli

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INTRODUCTION

After World War II, the Italian anti-Fascist democratic parties had achieved a high level of organisation and massive support.¹ The PCI was one of the biggest of them and became a serious contender for power, which placed Italy in an ambiguous situation regarding the other Western countries.²

Above all, the strength of the Communists was in evidence in the cultural field. This was partly because they had been excluded from government in 1947; and partly because they took as their starting point Antonio Gramsci's perspective on the political importance of European 20th Century culture and its reception in Italy from the point of view of the working class movement. Gramsci rejected the possibility of taking power only by means of the violent insurrection of an organised political vanguard. He believed instead that to reach cultural hegemony in society, a national consensus based on the worldview of the working class, was a preliminary task.

The sine qua non of achieving hegemony was the working class' ability to articulate a progressive bloc that comprised the peasantry, sectors of the lower middle class and the intelligentsia, as well as the proletariat as such.³

¹ The Italian Communist Party (PCI), the Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP), the Centre-left 'Partito d'azione' (Pd'a) and 'Demolaboristi' (Democratic Labour), the Italian Liberal Party (PLI) and the Christian Democracy (DC).

² See Stuart Woolf, 'History and Culture in the Post-war Era' in Emily Braun (ed.), Italian Art of the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1900-1988, Prestel-Verlag and Royal Academy of Arts, Munich and London, 1989, p. 273. See also David Ward, Antifascisms, Cultural Politics in Italy, 1943-46, Farleigh University Press and Associated University Press, Madison-Teaneck and London, 1996, p. 75.

³ The notion of 'Hegemony' was coined by Georgi Valentinovitch Plekhanov and later developed in different ways by V.I. Lenin, Gramsci, Stalin and Mao Zedong. See Vladimir Ilich Lenin, Opere complete, Vol. XVII, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1966; Antonio Gramsci, Prison

When Palmiro Togliatti, Gramsci's successor as party Chair, undertook the practical development of the latter's theories during the 1940s and 1950s, this policy of alliances became the basis of the PCI political programme.

Notebooks, New York and Chichester, Columbia University Press, 1996 ; Joseph Stalin The foundations of Leninism. Quilon. Mass. 1994; Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', New Left Review, London, November 1976-January 1977; Valentino Guerratana, 'Il concetto d'egemonia nella opera di Gramsci' in Giorgio Baratta and Andrea Cattone (ed.), Antonio Gramsci e il Progresso Intellettuale di Massa, Milan, Unicopoli, 1995; and Tom Bottomore, 'Hegemony' entry in Tom Bottomore (ed.), A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991.

1. Historical Context

The distinctive feature of post-war Italian politics was its tendency to divide into two opposed camps, each heavily inflected by ideological allegiance.

While the PCI remained firm as the head of the Left-wing bloc, the 'Democrazia Cristiana' (DC) became the organic party of the bourgeoisie and the Catholic hierarchy. Alongside these, a restricted group of intellectuals oscillated and took sides, depending of whether they were anti-Communist or anti-Clericalist.

Such a political and ideological division grew partly out of the international state of affairs after the outbreak of the Cold War, but also represented the recurrence of a situation that had emerged after the Italian unification of 1861-1870. This brought the country a combination of modern, secular public administration and bourgeois Liberal government that achieved its most developed ideological expression in the Idealist philosophy of Benedetto Croce. This Liberal state, however, immediately entered into contradiction with both the growing working class movement and the established Catholic Church, each with its own network for the transmission of ideas.⁴

The Liberal period was structurally undermined by the crisis of the First World War. In 1922, Fascism rose to power and set out to re-found Italy according to an authoritarian mass political model that was eventually defeated in World War II. Mussolini's regime was reactionary in politics. Nevertheless, Fascist

ideology was undetermined enough to attract a significant number of intellectuals to its ranks.⁵ These thought that the Regime's combination of Nationalism and mass Workerism would continue the political unification of the country at a social and cultural level. Other intellectuals, however, headed by Croce, remained attached to the democratic values of the Pre-war State and exercised a lasting opposition to the regime.⁶ Croce warned Fascist intellectuals that mixing culture and politics was mistaken⁷ In effect, he was one of the prominent intellectuals who first declared his anti-Fascism. He remained in Italy and became the reference point of those who viewed his thesis of the categorical distinction between culture and politics as a defence against the nationalising and totalising ideology of the Regime.

⁴ See Geoffrey Warner, 'The Roman Catholic Church', Open University course materials Liberation and Reconstruction: Politics, culture and Society in France and Italy, 1943-1954, The Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1989.

⁵ See, for example, Emily Braun, Mario Sironi and Fascist Art', in Emily Braun (ed.), op. cit. (1989). Also Emily Braun, 'Speaking Volumes: Giorgio Morandi's Still Lifes and the cultural Politics of "Strapaese"', Modernism and Modernity, Vol. 2.3, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1995, pp. 89-116.

⁶ David Ward, op. cit.

⁷ See Ibid.

2. Italian Art and The Cultural Politics of the PCI

After Fascism was defeated in 1944, both by the Allies and an armed coalition of anti-Fascist parties that comprised Christian Democrats, Communists, Liberals and smaller, short-lived Centre-Left organisations such as the Action Party and the Democratic Labour Party, the Communists pursued a wide progressive social alliance based in the common experience of the war and the resistance. The PCI policy towards the arts was tailored to this end, but the emergence of associations of artists for broad anti-Fascist political purposes was itself a spontaneous occurrence. Those who reached maturity in the late 1930s had in common the rejection of Fascist classicizing and Nationalist art, and they put aside their different aesthetic conceptions to take up the task of renewing Italian art in the light of international developments.

The anti-Fascism of many of these artists was not merely cultural but it was also expressed in overtly political terms. Since the 1930s, many of them viewed Croce's opposition as rather ineffective in combating the dictatorship, because his radical distinction between culture and politics prevented his anti-Fascism from evolving in the direction of a clear oppositional programme; and this helped the Communist party to draw them to its side. Somewhat paradoxically, however, these artists did not go underground or marginalise themselves from the official artistic milieu. Instead, they fully participated in the regime's artistic initiatives, and took advantage of these to create an unofficial network that developed a series of Anti-Fascist centres all over the country. According to the journalist Nello Ajello, 'This spontaneous

organisational work, developed in Italy, was very useful to ease Communism's passage from its 1920s clandestine tradition to that "new party" sponsored by Togliatti.'⁸

After the war, some of these artists withdrew from the political arena, but many others moved towards explicit Communist beliefs. The majority of these had been intellectually formed by Croce's version of Modernism, but they experienced a deep transformation in their work after they became politically involved with the Left. This was conveyed not only by conscious changes in their subjects, their style and their material means of expression, but also in the public they addressed and in their own conception of themselves as artistic authors. They thought that, by conforming to the demands of Communist politics, they were also overcoming the subjective isolation, which they regarded as the main limitation that afflicted 20th Century Modernism. The painter Renato Guttuso wrote that, in these years, there was born 'a new kind of intellectual, in which the figure of the man of culture and that of the Socialist militant came to form the same thing, quite different from the traditional intellectual (generally academic and aristocratic).'⁹ The 1930s Pablo Picasso of Guernica and Dreams and Lies of Franco became one of the symbols of this generation.¹⁰ According to Ajello, Communist politicians such as Togliatti and Gramsci similarly 'represent a model in that way. To distinguish [in them] the two moments of cultural research and political action would be impossible and even offensive.'¹¹

⁸ Nello Ajello, Intellettuali e PCI, 1944/1958, Laterza, Rome and Bari, 1997, p.41.

⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁰ See Mario De Micheli, Le avanguardie artistiche del novecento, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1986.

¹¹ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

The convergence of culture and politics in Italian art was also spurred on by the influence of Socialist Realism which, since the mid 1930s, had become the official artistic doctrine of international Communism. In Socialist Realist aesthetics, the criticism of Modernist individualism and detachment evolved into a kind of party-inspired art that regarded Modernist subjectivism and self-referentiality as the distinctive features of the organic culture of Capitalism in its terminal period.

Socialist Realist artists opposed their 'healthy', optimistic and politically engaged work to 'decadent' bourgeois Modern art. Yet, not just a negative reading of the separation of art from other aspects of life existed in these years within the Left. While hard-line PCI officials called on artists to conform their art to the exigencies of the revolution, others, even within the party, regarded unrestrained freedom and disinterest as the main characteristic of art; and insisted on the non-viability of a politically explicit aesthetics. The unorthodox Communist writer Elio Vittorini, for example, viewed all-out politically engaged aesthetics as the result of the persistence of a negative romantic component in Modern culture, the nostalgia for a lost spiritual unity in the face of post-war uncertainties, that lay at the basis of what he called 'the Communists' disposition to Totalitarianism'. He went on:

'The idealisation of belief (and, therefore, of not doubting, of giving up criticism and research as the sources of life) by which the young people found themselves needing to have a "superior" thing to believe in,' pushed many 'to

put themselves in the hands of any organism (of any police) that does not depend on our state of mind and can eventually make of us good and brave people, with the incorruptible virtue of a force alien to us.'¹²

At the outbreak of the Cold War, artistic freedom and social commitment were presented in mutually antagonistic terms. In this situation, many Left-wing artists and critics set out to achieve a compromise between both perspectives of all-out engagement and individual critical detachment; and reflected upon how the artist or writer could participate in politics without renouncing his independence. In the Secondo manifesto di pittori e scultori (Second Manifesto of Painters and Sculptors, 1944), the painters Ennio Morlotti and Ernesto Treccani developed a philosophy of the history of art, from the Renaissance to the 20th Century, that conceived Communist political engagement as the culmination of a long period of crisis. They argued that the emotional state of the intellectual in the face of the schism in taste and outlook between masses and elite, which mirrored the extreme division of labour under the conditions of Capitalism, could be taken as the starting point of a process towards Communist art. Such art was not, for them, the result of a mere personal adhesion to the revolution. Neither did they believe that it should be born out of the liquidation of Modernism, as had been the case with Socialist Realism. Rather, the new art would constitute Modernism's logical and historical consequence:

¹² Elio Vittorini, 'Il comunismo come apocalissi. Carattere romantico della disposizione anti-liberale al comunismo (e della disposizione comunista al totalitarismo)', ['Communism as Apocalypse. The romantic character of the anti-Liberal disposition to Communism (and the

'Until Raffaello Sanzio [i.e. until the Renaissance] we have art as a social product expressed by the individual... Henceforth, the crisis between man and society opened up; that is, the individual claims to overcome society. He becomes exasperated and critical: there is exasperation in Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Delacroix, Van Gogh, Modigliani and the 'Fauves'... After them, the crisis became even more exacerbated and gave rise to alienation, disorientation, and mysticism (in the Surrealists, Dadaism and Metaphysical Painting). Therefore artists have to confront once more the question of the individual in society... Picasso reproduced decadence in himself. Eventually however, the twentieth Century learned from Cubism and, with its new means, was able to express the crisis of a faltering bourgeois society. Picasso... simultaneously closes the crisis period and shows the way forward in the visual arts, to a Proletarian society.'¹³

This perspective of critically recovering the achievements of international Modern art and linking it to political revolution was quite distinct from the anti-Modernism of Soviet-inspired aesthetics which, since 1934, had developed separately from the main course of 20th Century art.¹⁴ However, from 1947, the increased intensity of the Cold War resulted in the political isolation of the Italian Left and its electoral defeat in 1948.¹⁵ As a consequence, many voices in the PCI placed under review the policy of alliances and openness that the

Communist disposition to Totalitarianism)) 'La Stampa', 6 September 1951, reprinted in Diario in pubblico, Milan, Fabbri, 1991, p. 379-380.

¹³ Ennio Morlotti and Ernesto Treccani, Secondo manifesto di pittori e scultori, 1944, reprinted in Paola Barocchi (ed.), Storia moderna dell'arte in Italia, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin, 1992, p. 42.

¹⁴ See Andrei Zhdanov, 'Speech to the Soviet Writers' Congress', 1934' in Stuart Sim, Art: Context and Value, The Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1992.

¹⁵ See Paul Ginsborg, A History of Contemporary Italy, Society and Politics, 1943-1988, London, Penguin, 1990, pp. 115-120.

Party had pursued so far and a Stalinist anti-Modernist trend became dominant. In line with the Soviet tendency to organise artists for explicitly political ends, the PCI set up a 'Central Committee Cultural Commission', an administrative cultural apparatus. Moreover, the Italian Communist artists began to become integrated in the artistic circles of the East European countries and, at home, they worked on initiatives aimed exclusively at the Italian Left-wing world.

This went hand in hand with an almost exclusive focus on political subject-matter; and an artistic technique governed by the imperative of comprehensibility to the working masses; in essence, the abandonment of experimentalism for a more legible realism. When seen from the point of view of the traditional cultured Italian, educated in the Liberal tradition, this stress on comprehensibility and engagement seemed to propose an unacceptable subordination of culture to politics, alien to the national tradition of freedom of research, and leading to an impoverishment of intellectual production. But, on the other hand, when seen from the perspective of the PCI officials in charge of cultural politics, sensitive to the rise of the masses into the political arena, this strategy seemed to promise the democratisation of culture, hitherto in the hands of an elite engaged in Byzantine abstract discussions of little interest for the majority.

Eventually, many artists found the Communists' pressure to make explicitly political art unacceptable, and this caused the 'Fronte nuovo delle arti' (New Art's Front), a group that was the artistic counterpart of the political Left, to

split.¹⁶ Tension also increased within the party cultural apparatus, which had itself become divided between Socialist Realists and others who defended a cultural policy more relaxed and attentive to the characteristic concerns of the Italian intelligentsia.¹⁷

After 1951, the serious risk of deeper divisions within the Left-wing intelligentsia moved the PCI to rectify its line and return to the policy carried out prior to 1947. As a result, although a wide alliance of artists of the 'Fronte's' sort was never recomposed, the Communists managed to maintain their privileged relationship with the intellectual class. This enabled them to increase their social prestige and be seen as 'the party of culture', albeit at the expense of a clear Communist cultural paradigm.¹⁸

The central role of the PCI in Italian culture throughout the post-war period, however, contrasted with its inability to displace the Christian Democrats from political power. Stalinist party members stressed the mass dimension of culture, and intended to use intellectuals to shape highly politicised masses. But this policy failed due to the resistance of an important sector of intellectuals who refused merely to play the role of propagandists.

Conversely, in the preceding and following periods, hegemony was conceived as becoming the political point of reference for the intelligentsia. Ironically, however, the Communist attempt to achieve influence in the world of high culture coincided, from the second half of the 1940s, with the rapid decline of

¹⁶ See my sub-section: 'Togliatti's Intervention and the Crisis of the Fronte of Artists', pp. 268 and ff.

¹⁷ See my section: Emilio Sereni and the Cultural Commission, pp. 127 and ff.

the role of these traditional intellectuals, indeed of high culture as such, in providing social influence and shaping public opinion. The new means of mass communication, including cinema, first, and then television, seemed to act upon the public more strongly than the traditional intellectuals and, to a large extent, these media were in the hands of the anti-Communist bloc. Therefore, from a political point of view, debates about how to integrate a social sector so jealous of its independence and intellectual sophistication were, in reality, losing their importance. Despite a series of clashes and controversies, the PCI attempt to frame the fine arts in its organisational strategy was largely a success. Yet, their focus on the traditional intelligentsia also meant a lack of long-term perspective. It ultimately functioned as a limit on the party policy of winning hegemony, insofar as that aim did not become articulated with a consistent policy towards the new hegemonic apparatuses.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Stephen Gundle, I comunisti italiani tra Hollywood e Mosca: la sfida della cultura di massa (1943-1945), Guiunti gruppo editoriale, Florence 1992.

¹⁹ See Ibid. and Nello Ajello, op. cit.

PART ONE: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF THE PCI.

I 'THE NEW PARTY': BETWEEN THE DEFEAT OF FASCISM, THE CRISIS OF LIBERALISM AND THE HEGEMONY OF THE CHURCH

1. The PCI and the Political Evolution of Italy during the Post-war Period

After the Allies' landed in Sicily in 1943, Vittorio Emmanuele III ordered the arrest of Mussolini and appointed Marshall Pietro Badoglio as the head of a cabinet charged to negotiate peace. Then, Italy surrendered, the Germans occupied the North of the country and a Partisan movement was immediately organised, under the direction of the 'Comitatti di liberazione nazionale' (National Committees of Liberation), that included the major anti-Fascist political parties from the Left to the Centre.²⁰

In the first instance, the Left-wing parties boycotted this government and called for the immediate abdication of the King for his earlier support of Mussolini, while the Centre and the Right remained undecided. The interregnum ended with the USSR's recognition of Badoglio's government and Togliatti's arrival from Moscow in March 1944. In a crucial policy speech at the port of Salerno, he made clear that the immediate objective of the Communists was liberation and not revolution; and that the PCI would leave

²⁰ For accounts of the history of post-war Italy, see Luigi Lombardi Satriani, 'La dc nel periodo degasperiano' in Luca Romano and Paolo Scabello, C'era una volta la DC. Breve storia del periodo degasperiano attraverso manifesti elettorali della democrazia cristiana, Salvelli,

the form of the new State to be decided by popular vote.²¹ Accordingly, the Communists accepted an offer to join the Government. Their idea was to form a preliminary cabinet with all mass parties: PSI, PCI and DC,²² until the elections were held. However, these were repeatedly postponed until 2 June 1946, when they were conducted together with a referendum on the monarchy. The referendum proclaimed the republic, but the DC gained the majority in the elections, while the PCI was relegated to third place, after the Socialists.²³

The bad results in the polls forced the PCI to continue its policy of alliances and postpone the revolution further. The Communists joined the ensuing DC Government, but they had, by then, very little influence on it, and were expelled the following year.²⁴ After the new constitution came into effect on 1 January 1948,²⁵ Socialist and Communists worked together in the 'Fronte democratico popolare' coalition (People's Democratic Front), until the first Republic elections on April 18 of the same year, but they were defeated again. From then on, the Left had to acknowledge its new oppositional role and prepare for a long period of isolation.²⁶

Rome, 1975, pp. 2-6; Giorgio Galli in Germano Celant (ed.), The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943-1968, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1994, pp. 648-681 and Paul Ginsborg, op. cit.

²¹ See Paul Ginsborg, op. cit., p. 43.

²² Luigi Lombardi Satriani, op. cit., p. 5.

²³ The DC gained 35.2% of the vote, and the PCI 18.9%. See Luciano Gruppi, Togliatti e la via italiana al socialismo, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1974.

²⁴ See *ibid.*

²⁵ See Giorgio Galli, op. cit., pp. 648-681.

²⁶ This time the DC achieved 38% of the vote, followed by the 'Fronte' with a 31%. In the June 1953 election, the DC won 40% of the vote but the Communists and Socialists recovered their support with 37%. A small group of centre parties achieved 9.3%, but of greater significance was the relative recovery of the extreme-right. 13% of the vote went to the post-Fascist 'Movimento sociale italiano' (MSI) and the monarchist 'Partito nazionale monarchico,' which was particularly strong in the South. The centre parties, the remnants of the previous progressive Liberals, would never support the 'Fronte,' but also refused to form a government with the DC. De Gasperi attempted to govern alone and then approached the

The DC presented the PCI exclusion from government as the result of an effort to consolidate democracy, saving Italy from a Stalinist dictatorship.²⁷ However, the measures employed meant the beginning of a process of political regression from the immediate post-war period and, for some years, there was a serious risk that the law would be employed to limit the Communists' activities. Trials and police repression followed; and Leftist-orientated cultural initiatives were banned.²⁸ These included the 'Exhibition of

extreme right, but the moderate majority in the DC forced him to resign in August 1953. The Centre-right slight majority was recomposed in 1954 by Mario Scelba, signalling the final victory of the DC in the post-war struggle for power and creating a situation that would continue in the following years. See Rossana Rossanda, 'Ancora sul '56: memorie a confronto', *La rivista del Manifesto*, 1999, pp. 58-61; and Stuart Woolf, op. cit.

²⁷ See Luigi Lombardi Satriani, op. cit.

²⁸ Between April 1948 and May 1954, 670 people were tried for selling *L'Unità*, the Communist newspaper, 1086 for fly-posting and 338 for attending political meetings. In the South, violence was also unleashed against the strong movement of land occupation that accompanied the agrarian reform of the Communist Minister of Agriculture from 1944 to 1947, Fausto Gullo. (See Paul Ginsborg, op. cit., pp. 60-63) In Sicily, the cities voted for the Right, either Christian Democrat or post-Fascist, while the peasantry was Left-wing. In 1947, 2000 PCI and PSI members of Piana degli Albanesi, San Giuseppe Jato and San Cipirello gathered to commemorate May Day in Portella della Ginestra. The gang of Salvatore Giuliano, a bandit related to the Mafia who fought for the return of the monarchy and the independence of the island, attacked at the crowd with machine guns and grenades. Eleven people were killed and another 50 were wounded. The Christian Democrat Home Secretary, Mario Scelba, denied in Parliament that the crime had a political dimension. Yet, in 1949, Giuliano wrote a letter to the newspapers and the police where he explained that 'One could not ignore the diabolic growing of the red dogs who, by encouraging the workers with nonsensical promises, have profited and benefited from their votes to convert Sicily into a servant of the Soviet machine.' (Quoted in documents for internal use of NON SOLO PORTELLA, the association of relatives of the victims of Portella della Ginestra and the Mafia, Partinico, Sicily. Information provided by Germana di Paola). After this, Emmanuelle Busellini, who witnessed the crime from a nearby garden, was kidnapped and shot dead. Three days later, the Carabineers who were searching for Giuliano suffered a mysterious road accident, with 2 dead and 23 wounded. On 22 June, there were attacks with machine guns and grenades on the PCI sections at Partinico and Borgetto, resulting in two dead and 5 wounded; and on the trade union premises at Carini and San Giuseppe Jato, with four dead and seven wounded. The following day, the PCI cell at Cinisi, and the PSI of Monreale were attacked. (Ibid.) In December 1949, a crowd of 20000 Basilicata day-labourers occupied 15000 hectares in Matera. The same month, the people from Montecaglioso occupied the land of the Lacava family. A week later, the police took the village during the night. They cut off the electricity and the telephone line and began searches of the houses. The day-labourer Giuseppe Novello was shot dead in the tumult and Anna Avena and Nunzia Suglia, the two women who led the occupation, were imprisoned for two years and four months. (See Paul Ginsborg, op. cit.) In the Fucino river basin, in February 1950, the day-labourers occupied 2500 of the 16000 hectares owned by the Prince of Tolonia. On 22 February, there was a general strike in the zone in support of the occupations. On 30 April, Tolonia's men shot at the crowd and killed Antonio Beradicuti and Agostino Paris. (Ibid., pp. 127-128)

Photographs of Soviet Achievements in Agricultural Technology', to be shown in Reggio Emilia, Bologna and Ferrara; and Cremona's 'Exhibition of Romanian Art', organised in 1953 by the Association for the Promotion of Cultural Relationships with Romania.²⁹ In addition, the 1950 campaign for peace included the art show called 'Arte contro la barbarie' ('Art Against Barbarism'), the continuation of a L'Unità initiative that first took place in 1944. In its initial form, the exhibition entries illustrated the events of the war, but, in 1951, it focused on protests against the atomic bomb on the occasion of a visit to Italy of the American President Eisenhower.³⁰ Despite the assertive political scope, the show gathered artists of all trends, from the broadly non-figurative Renato Birolli, Antonio Corpora, Emilio Vedova, Pietro Consagra and Giulio Turcato, to the 'Realisti' Guttuso, Giuseppe Migneco, Armando Pizzinato, Leoncillo Leonardi and Giuseppe Zigaina, as well as the 1930s figure Mario Mafai. On the opening day, anti-riot police closed the building and surrounded it, arguing that the exhibition was not licensed.³¹ A furious Guttuso talked in L'Unità of 'an explicit violation of the most elementary rights of Italian artists, that is: the right to express their thought with their work',³² and accused the Minister of Interior, Mario Scelba, of personally giving the order. A few months later, the same Scelba refused to grant the East German

²⁹ See the Records of the Commissione VI Istruzione e Belle arti of the Congress of Deputies, Library of the Congress, Interr. Berti, Giuseppe fu Angelo, Marchesi, Bernier e Barbieri, ann.5 December 1952 and 26 February 1953, divieto di mostra fotografica di informazione sulle realizzazioni tecnicoagricole sovietiche in Reggio Emilia, Bologna e Ferrara, es. 13 March 1953. Also, the Records of the Commissione VI Istruzione e Belle arti of the Congress of Deputies, Library of the Congress, Interr. Maglietta ann. 21 Dicembre 1951, negata concessione di un locale per la mostra di pittura al comune di San Giorgio a Cremano (Napoli) es. 30 May 1952.

³⁰ See the Records of the Commissione VI Istruzione e Belle arti of the Congress of Deputies, Library of the Congress, Interr. Marchesi ann. 199 January 1951: ingiustificato divieto da parte della autorità di P.S. dell'allestimento della II mostra 'Arte contro la barbarie'; es. 8 maggio 1951.

³¹ See 'La cultura combatte per la pace', Il calendario del popolo, n. 77, February 1951, p. 786.

playwright Bertolt Brecht and his theatre company a visa to perform Mother Courage at Venice's Fenice theatre.³³

³² Renato Guttuso, 'Cocciuti o barbari?' L'Unità, 13 March 1951.

³³ See Luciano Lucignani, 'Lo scandalo Brecht. Contro l'arte internazionale l'Italia eleva ai suoi confini una barriera di divieti di polizia', Il calendario del popolo, n. 85, October 1951, p. 968.

2. The PCI and Stalin's Soviet Union

When reviewing the relationship of the PCI with the Italian State during the post-war period, Luciano Gruppi has argued that:

'These years witnessed what could be called, to use somewhat pompous language, the production of a "Conventio ad Excludendum" -which, leaving aside that this was never a concept of Roman law anyway, is certainly a practice forbidden by the Constitution... It is evident that, from 1948 onwards, there was a permanent tendency to repress democratic freedom, with Fascist public security regulations being widely invoked to ban demonstrations and manifestos.'³⁴

The PCI's international relations largely contributed to its isolation on the home front. The Third International had been dissolved by Stalin in 1943 due to Allied pressures on the USSR, but in September 1947 the first meeting of Cominform, a board of information among the European Communist parties, was held in Poland.³⁵ This signalled a turning point in the policy of alliances of anti-Fascist mass political parties that international Communism had pursued thus far.³⁶ The expulsion of the PCI from government had been preceded by a similar measure in France that year, and followed a combined action by the Western occupying powers in Germany to exclude the USSR

³⁴ In Luciano Gruppi, Prologue to Palmiro Togliatti, *Opere*, Istituto Gramsci and Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1979, Vol. 5, p. XCIX.

³⁵ See Luciano Gruppi, op. cit.. (1974).

³⁶ See Ruth Amende Sosa, 'The Soviet Theory of "People's Democracy"', *World Politics*, Vol. 1, n.4, John Hopkins University Press, July 1949, pp. 489-510.

from economic decisions by issuing a new currency, the 'Deutsche Mark', in the area of their jurisdiction.³⁷

In this context, Communist politicians presented the USSR as a 'great and peaceful country'³⁸ whose, at times, aggressive foreign policy was aimed to 'break the iron ring that had put her under siege since 1917... [with the help of] the peoples' liberation movements of her neighbour countries.'³⁹

NATO, however, was viewed as 'an association of criminals';⁴⁰ and PCI politicians stressed at the earliest opportunity that 'the Soviet fleet is not in our seas, but the American fleet.'⁴¹

Ajello argues that the international situation forced the PCI to fight battles which were not really its: 'Togliatti's strategy intended to acclimatise his party to the Italian tradition. His obsessive desire to make it "accepted in society" was at the risk of failure due to these external pressures.'⁴² However, Cominform was not the International. The member parties were not mere sections of a single party, but could pursue their own politics according to national particularities.⁴³ After the Yalta agreements, moreover, the Italian Communists knew that the USSR would not become decisively involved in October-like revolutionary uprisings within the American sphere of influence. The Western powers, in turn, were stationed in the peninsula, and the

³⁷ For an account of the reasons for Cold War from an Eastern Bloc perspective, see Geschichte der SED Abriß, Central Committee of the United Socialist Party of Germany and Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, Dietz Verlag, East-Berlin, 1978.

³⁸ Renato Guttuso, Unpublished Notes for a Speech at Piana dei Greci for the 1949 Sicilian Electoral Campaign, Guttuso Archive, Civica Galleria Renato Guttuso, Bagheria, 1949 (a).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.142.

referendum on the monarchy had been won by a very narrow margin: 12,717,923 votes, most of them concentrated in the North, against 10,719,284 votes, with Southern cities such as Naples supporting the King by 80%.⁴⁴ Insofar as it is permitted to speculate, a Communist uprising in Italy could have led to either a long and unwinnable civil war, such as in Greece, or the partition of the country, such as in Germany. Both choices seemed unacceptable for the PCI,⁴⁵ but they still thought that it was possible to initiate a series of reforms from a Socialist perspective, as long as they were able to forge for themselves an image of moral and intellectual authority.

The independence of the European Communist parties increased after the horrors of Stalin's dictatorship were unveiled at the 1956 XX Congress of the Soviet Communist Party.⁴⁶ But as early as 1954, just a year after Stalin's death, Guttuso explained to party cell representatives gathered in Perugia, on behalf of the Central Committee, that 'it is evident that the idea of the USSR as leader-state has been overtaken by the situation.'⁴⁷ He listed personality cult and bureaucratisation as the main mistakes of the USSR. At the same time, however, he stressed that the PCI would firmly defend the unity of the international Communist movement :

⁴³ See Luciano Gruppi, op. cit.. (1974).

⁴⁴ See Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See Nikita S. Khrushchev, The Secret Speech on the Cult of Personality, Congressional Record: Preceedings and Debates of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 2nd Session, 22 May-11 June 1956, pp. 9389-9403, in the Internet Modern History Sourcebook, Fordham university, WWW.Fordham.edu.

⁴⁷ Renato Guttuso, Unpublished Speech at the Perugia Congress of Party Cells, Perugia, 1954, Guttuso Archive, Civica Galleria Renato Guttuso, Bagheria.

'We do not accept... a division between Stalinist and democratic Communist parties... We see some positive things in the Soviet Union, and do not conceive Stalinism solely as degeneration. If we were to do that, we would risk losing an important part of Socialism. We would fall into opportunism, and lose those principles that Stalin defended, despite his mistakes and crimes. We neither accept nor reject Stalinism, but want to move forward... There are problems and uncertainties, but we have to examine them together... The deep reasons why we are Communists remain today, as much as ever, deeply rooted in our minds and hearts.'⁴⁸

More graphically, Rossana Rossanda, a young intellectual who belonged to the Cultural Commission, explained that, for the party members:

'The USSR was the first Socialist state. It was a poorer society than ours (we were not idiots), but it was a fairer one. Moreover it was Stalingrad that had broken the Wehrmacht's bones. It was a great country, a great ally of the opponents of Nazism. Yet, in the post war period, worrying news began to filter through: the condemnation of Yugoslavia, the coup in Prague... However, during the Cold War, [the USSR] had the same enemy that we did... The Government and the Capitalists had decided: Democracy yes. Communism no. Even if we won 51% of the vote, we wouldn't reach power. There would have been a coup. Meanwhile, however, we were far away from reaching such majority. So we worked, and cut our losses... We were not waiting for X hour. But we did believe that the Cold War would end. Sooner

⁴⁸ Ibid.

or later, we believed anti-Communism would collapse. From 1945, ...the PCI became a force that aimed for a future transformation... Let's imagine that we had known about [Stalin's crimes]... in 1948 or in 1951. What could we have done? Would we have quit or would we have stuck at it? We would have cut our losses and kept going... Trombadori told this story: ...when the gulag and the executions were a thing of the past, Socialism would fly again like a little bird that, surprised by the cold and the frost, had been buried under a big and warm cow shit. It is certainly shit, but it prevented the bird from dying.'⁴⁹

⁴⁹ In Rossana Rossanda, *op. cit.* (1999), pp. 58-61.

3. The Defeat of Fascism, the Crisis of Liberalism and Catholic Hegemony.

3.a. Communism and Fascism as Mass Movements.

It could be argued that both Fascism and Communism were different historical expressions of the same period of mass political agitation.⁵⁰ Originally, however, Gramsci conceived Fascism as the merely repressive response of the ruling classes to workers' agitation. He wrote in L'ordine nuovo that 'Fascism and democracy are two aspects of a single reality, two different forms of a single activity: the activity which the Bourgeois class carries out to halt the proletarian class on its path.'⁵¹ Other 1920s European dictatorships, such as that of General Miguel Primo de Rivera in Spain, had been expressions of repressive coalitions of Conservative forces in the face of workers' agitation, and were based on a rhetoric of the restoration of law and order with only a limited 'hegemonic effect'. But Italian Fascism produced its own ideology of collaboration between workforce, intelligentsia and capital for the superior interest of the nation; and enjoyed mass support in Italy for over twenty years.

⁵⁰See Manuel Espadas Burgos, 'El fascismo italiano en los años 20', 'La Europa de las dictaduras' in Siglo XX historia universal, Historia 16, Madrid, 1983, p. 73; Antonio Gramsci, op. cit. (1975), p.1429-1430; Giampiero Carocci, Storia dell'Italia moderna, Newton Compton Editori, Rome, 1995 and José Ortega y Gasset, 'La rebelión de la masas', 1929, in Obras completas de José Ortega y Gasset, Madrid, Alianza Editorial and Revista de Occidente, Vol. III, 1994.

⁵¹ Antonio Gramsci, 'Democracy and Fascism', Unsigned Article in L'ordine nuovo 1 November 1924, translated by Quintin Hoare and reprinted in the Marx-Engels Internet Archive, <http://csf.colorado.edu/mirrors/marxists.org>. For further information, see also Quintin Hoare's introduction to Antonio Gramsci, op. cit., (1971).

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historic course that Communism had actually taken. For example, the Fascist intellectual Berto Ricci⁵⁶ made it clear that they were not Communists, because Communism was State Capitalism, whose materialism was 'incompatible with human nature [and it meant] a wrong response to the working classes' legitimate desire for justice.'⁵⁷ However, in Ricci, anti-Communism often accompanied a pseudo-Marxist discourse or, at least, a stress on the same set of questions that the Marxists discussed. He wrote in Giuseppe Bottai's⁵⁸ Critica fascista, in June 1935, that the issue, regarding the corporate organisation of the economy, was not 'to abolish property... but the proletariat itself, that is, those without property; this means to acknowledge that property... cannot be separated from the producer... [We do not intend to] eliminate human initiative, but the indefinite accumulation of private wealth.'⁵⁹

Accordingly, the core of the Fascist education system consisted in helping workers to achieve 'consciousness of being the producers and... make of them, in the practice, responsible owners.'⁶⁰ In 1933, Ricci, the painter Ottone Rosai and up to ten other intellectuals published a manifesto in Ricci's L'Universale fortnightly where they declared the need to subordinate economic questions to politics and support state interventionism. They

⁵⁶ Berto Ricci was a mathematician close to 'Strapaese', who wrote for the Il selvaggio, La voce, Lacerba, Critica fascista, Civiltà fascista, Il popolo d'Italia, Il giornale di Genova, Il lavoro fascista, L'Impero and Il Bargello. He founded the short-lived Il Rosai journal in 1930 and L'Universale in 1931, which ceased publication when Ricci departed for Ethiopia as a Black Shirt volunteer in 1935. See Paolo Ricci, op. cit.

⁵⁷ See Ibid., p.14.

⁵⁸ Bottai was the head of the 'Arditi' pre-Fascist association and a member of the Government. See Günter Berghaus, Futurism and Politics, Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944, Berghahn Books, Providence and Oxford, 1996.

⁵⁹ See Berto Ricci's article in, Critica fascista, June 1935, quoted in Paolo Ricci, op. cit.

demanded that the Corporate state should ensure trade union membership for all workers, insurance and adequate legislation to protect them, as well as the 'qualitative and quantitative limitation of property rights and... the subordination of private to state interests.'⁶¹ Yet, at the same time as they took their distance from Marxism, the signatories foresaw 'the end of the Liberal system..., the gradual participation of the workers in the companies and the end of the proletariat.'⁶²

From this point of view, Fascism was the opposite of a chauvinist and provincial political regime. In the words of Paolo Ricci, the system intended to become a 'third way'⁶³ between Capitalism and Communism. In November 1936, Mussolini had said that 'today, Bolshevism or Communism is nothing but state super-Capitalism brought to its most ferocious expression; Communism does not mean, therefore, the rejection of Capitalism, but its continuation and sublimation.'⁶⁴ Within this ideological framework, many potential members of the Left had no problems lining up with Fascism, where they saw the opportunity 'to carry out the social revolution in an even more revolutionary way than Moscow.'⁶⁵

⁶⁰ This was the objective of Bottai's 'School Chapter', approved by the Fascist Grand Council on 15 February 1939. See Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 12

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Paolo Ricci, op cit. Also David Atkinson, 'Enculturing Fascism? Towards Historical Geographies of Inter-war Italy', Journal of Historical Geography, 25, 3, 1999, pp. 393-400.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

In post-war Communist literature, however, Fascism was presented as a non-Italian, Germanic force, while the PCI defined itself as a national party.⁶⁶ Yet, the PCI did not completely deny the existence of a Fascist Left wing.⁶⁷

Instead, it occasionally became one of the targets of the Communists' message when they called on intellectuals to join the party regardless of their religious or political beliefs. The only condition was an agreement to rethink the Italian cultural tradition, and their own work, from the point of view of the working class. For example, in Lo stato operaio, a PCI newspaper edited in Paris from 1936, the historian of Christianity Ambrogio Donini wrote that:

'We the Communists extend the hand of friendship for the first time to the honest intellectuals, Fascist and non-Fascist, who live by their own work, suffer with the suffering of the people and want to end the moral and material decadence of our Italy... The Communist Party, the party of unity and the reconciliation of all Italians, knows that its call will not go unheard.'⁶⁸

After the war, further, albeit veiled, self-criticism was made of Gramsci's maximalist policy during the L'ordine nuovo years, as the Communists became aware of the need for a policy directed towards Fascism's social basis. A PCI magazine, Il calendario del popolo, stated in 1947 that:

⁶⁶ This argument was not borrowed from Gramsci, but from Croce, who regarded Fascism as 'a Germanic infection of the essentially healthy Italian spirit'. (In David Ward, op. cit., p. 125).

⁶⁷ For Atkinson, this implies that Fascism 'thus developed a new way for the masses to experience and participate in politics. They could become "involved" in the Fascist state and be cajoled towards a collective, post-democratic identification with Fascism.' In David Atkinson, op. cit., p. 396.

⁶⁸ Ambrogio Donini, 'Gli intellettuali italiani e la riconciliazione nazionale, Lo stato operaio, X, n. 7, July 1936.

'The big capitalists profited from the urban small and medium bourgeoisie's desire for social justice... Fascism presented itself as the achievement of all their hopes: progress, social justice and the end of landowners. So the 'Fasci di combattimento' were born in 1919, with a Populist and Socialist-like programme.'⁶⁹

Regarding Bottai's 'Arditi', another proto-Fascist organisation, an anonymous contributor to the same magazine argued that:⁷⁰

'It was a movement originated in Rome with some politically dubious elements, but the Communist Party could have infiltrated it... So [the party] let down a lively group of young people that only wanted to be well led, to confront the Fascist squads in their own field.'⁷¹

3.b. The PCI and Liberalism: Secularism and Modernity

In the words of the historian Gianpiero Carocci: 'Togliatti gave concrete indications of what a component of Post-fascism should be, and laid the main outlines of a Communist party that would learn from the experience that Fascism imposed on Italy, organising large masses of people.'⁷² Croce had used the term 'Totalitarianism' to equate Fascism and Communism, and had

⁶⁹ Unsigned Article, 'Come e perché il fascismo giunse al potere', Il calendario del popolo, n. 34, July 1947, p.117.

⁷⁰ The 'Arditi' were volunteer assault troops during World War I. The association of veteran 'arditi' was one of the components of the early Fascist movement. (See Günter Berghaus, op. cit.)

⁷¹ Unsigned Article, 'Come e perché il fascismo giunse al potere', op. cit., p.117.

⁷² Gianpiero Carocci, op. cit. (1996), p. 71.

opposed both to Liberalism.⁷³ He viewed Marxism as a doctrine for changing the world, which meant that it had a practical and not a theoretical scope. Its philosophical aspect was subordinated to revolutionary exigencies, thereby declaring itself an enemy of the pure and disinterested truth.⁷⁴ For Croce, the Marxists unjustifiably foresaw the definitive salvation of the human species, a mythical reign of freedom where history would end, instead of considering the latter as the history of freedom, fed with eternally renewing oppositions and contrasts.⁷⁵ Their claim to know the true cause of the historical process revealed a form of theological thought that in his view was as totalitarian as other doctrines that regarded God, the race or the environment as the motor of history.⁷⁶

For these reasons, Croce believed that, in 1944, Communism did not possess 'any constructive force... [whereas Liberalism] will seize again its dominion.'⁷⁷ This was an erroneous reading of the Italian political situation insofar as, in the words of the historian David Ward: 'If any Italian political party was to emerge from the post-war period devoid of constructive force, it was Croce's Liberal party.'⁷⁸

For its part, Il calendario del popolo stated that: 'Croce was anti-Fascist, but he substantially agreed with Fascism in the fight against Communism.

⁷³ See Benedetto Croce, 'Messaggio di Croce per la indipendenza della cultura,' Risorgimento liberale, 13 April 1948, in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.167.

⁷⁴ See Ernesto De Martino, 'Cultura e classe operaia', Quarto stato, 3, n° 1, 1948, pp. 19-22 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed), Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto De Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948-1955, La Nuova Italia Editrice, Florence, 1977, pp. 43-44.

⁷⁵ See David Ward, op. cit., p.70.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Therefore, while he led the anti-Fascist movement, he was in fact helping to sustain Mussolini's regime.'⁷⁹ It was true that he had opposed Fascism, but it was also true that he never represented a real danger for the regime, because, the Communists believed, his philosophy had operated in an ideological way, hindering and rendering ineffective his anti-Fascist practice, while providing the regime with a mask of intellectual openness. After the war, he advocated a return to pre-First World War Liberalism, but, precisely, such Liberalism had already failed to halt Fascist totalitarianism. As Togliatti argued in 1944, Croce's politics during the Post-Second World War period demonstrated 'one thing only: ... his own ineptitude.'⁸⁰ A year later, Vittorini would also suggest that Croceanism had played an instrumental role within the Fascist regime, and he would write that 'to only take care of the "spirit", allowing a "Caesar" to take care of bread and work, means to constrain oneself within an intellectual role and let "Caesar" dominate man's soul. Could the attempt to produce a new culture to defend, and not merely to console man, interest the Idealist...?'⁸¹

Vittorini carried out an original attempt to overcome Croce's polemic with Marxism and integrate the enlightened and critical aspect of his philosophy

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ward writes that 'the hegemony that Croce had been able to establish over Italian intellectuals was perhaps the greatest obstacle to the formation of the new generation of organic intellectuals who maintained allegiances to the interests and development of the working classes.' In David Ward, op. cit., p. 68.

⁸⁰ in Palmiro Togliatti, 'Inettitudine,' *Rinascita*, II, April 1945. In addition, many young Liberals were already aware of the shortcomings of traditional Liberalism in the 1930s. Some of them had attempted to organise a progressive political force, the 'Partito d'azione' but, despite having exercised a certain influence on the Resistance, the lack of electoral support led to the organisation's dissolution in 1948. Ward listed, among the causes for its failure, the typical weaknesses of political Liberalism: 'The lack of discipline on the part of some party exponents and its failure to penetrate the fabric of Italian society and spread its message beyond a limited group of intellectuals.' See Ward, David, op. cit., p. 134.

⁸¹ Elio Vittorini, 'Una nuova cultura', Editorial in *Il politecnico*, 29 September 1945, p.2.

with the party programme. He viewed Liberalism as a vaccination against the 'return to spiritual unity that every Romantic thinker envied in the Middle Ages and that, unfortunately, Marx does not manage to remove from his own doctrine. Likewise the idealisation of the ability to believe (and therefore of accepting, of not doubting, of giving up research and criticism as sources of life)'⁸²

These were, for Vittorini, 'typical aberrations of the fascistised youth in Italy and Germany'. He went on: 'The writer or the artist who joins Communism in France, in England or in the United States does so precisely because he sees in the Communist effort, or in the effort of the USSR... the way to solve, together with various social problems, the different contemporary spiritual uneasinesses that he perceives... a malady afflicting human relationships in Liberal societies...' ⁸³

Gramsci had also reflected upon the relationship between Liberalism and Marxism after his politics failed and the PCI became almost dismantled by the Fascists.⁸⁴ A Gramscian cultural politics, such as that pursued by the post-war PCI, was intended to be developed by means of a confrontation with and assimilation of this philosophical trend.⁸⁵ Ward underlines the links between Italian Liberalism and Communism when he writes that Gramsci's programme consisted in doing what Croce had been reluctant to do –namely, to 'spread... an intellectual and moral reform to be carried out on a national scale in a way

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ See Antonio Gramsci, op. cit. (1975).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

that Liberalism failed to do and only achieved for small sections of the population.'⁸⁶ Togliatti seemed to endorse this reading when he retrospectively declared in 1964 that the biggest success of the PCI cultural politics during the post-war period was 'the victory, among the working classes, of a democratic civil consciousness.'⁸⁷

As a political force, the PCI excluded the PLI and Croce himself from its strategy of alliances, but attempted to absorb its electoral and social base. PCI leaders had clear in their minds that Liberal ideology influenced Italian society in a deeper and more diffuse way than the weak Partito Liberale Italiano did.⁸⁸ This involved, however, a complex historical and theoretical work of adaptation by 1940s and 1950s Marxism.⁸⁹ Despite the climate of social engagement of these years, many members of the 'intelligentsia' did not feel comfortable with the constant necessity of taking political sides, something that was implicit in Cold War politics as a whole. For these reasons, Luigi Russo, the director of the Belfagor review, underlined the similarities of Communist culture with basic Fascist sloganeering 'to believe, to obey and to combat.'⁹⁰ Yet, in practice, the political brainchildren of Liberal secular Anti-Fascist intellectuals, such as the Centre-Left Partito d'azione (Action Party) and the Demolaboristi (Democratic Labour), had failed, sunk in

⁸⁶ David Ward, op. cit., pp. 67-84.

⁸⁷ 'Sette domande al direttore, interview with Palmiro Togliatti in Rinascita, 27 June 1964, reprinted in La rinascita della sinistra, Rome, 10 October 1999, p. XIX.

⁸⁸ See unsigned Article, 'Benedetto Croce', Il calendario del popolo, n. 34, July 1947, p. 210

⁸⁹ According to the Gramscian anthropologist Ernesto De Martino:

'Whoever does not acknowledge this historical precedent of the Russian working class... risks falling into mistakes and deviations that have been already been overcome by the most advanced sectors of the international proletariat... Ernesto De Martino, op. cit. (1948), pp. 19-22 en Carla Pasquinelli (ed), op. cit., pp. 43-44.

⁹⁰ Luigi Russo, 'Dialogo con un lettore di Belfagor, Belfagor, I, n° 5, 15 September 1947, p. 612 in Nello Ajello, op. cit., pp.42-43.

their lack of organisation and discipline and their elitism; or, as in the case of the PLI, had become a conservative force with a secondary role relative to the DC. Consequently, if the choice was either clerical obscurantism or Communist 'barbaric' politicisation of culture, the majority of secular intellectuals preferred to support the Left-wing bloc, though with reservations.

This situation demanded that the party leadership did not provoke fears of ideological control. Instead, they presented the PCI as the result of a generic alliance of labour and culture. As Togliatti put it to the party membership:

'The Capitalist world creates the conditions that aim to destroy the freedom of intellectual life. We must become the champions of free artistic creation and scientific progress. This demands that we do not abstractly oppose our conceptions to currents and trends of a different nature but, on the contrary, we must open a dialogue with these and, in this way, we must make an effort to deepen the understanding of cultural issues in the manner they are put forward today. Not everybody who is far away from us, in the different fields of culture, philosophy, the historical and social sciences, is our enemy or an agent of our enemies. It is reciprocal understanding, conquest by means of continuous debate, that gives us authority and prestige and, at the same time, allows us to discover our real enemies, the false thinkers, the charlatans of artistic expression, etc.'⁹¹

⁹¹Palmiro Togliatti, 'Sullo sviluppo de nostro movimento', La rinascita della sinistra, Rome, 10 October 1999, p. XX.

3.c. The PCI and the Christian Democrats.

The Catholic question also became a central issue for the 'partito nuovo'.⁹² Both Croceanism and Left-wing Fascism came from the same tradition of secular culture that had viewed the Church as the main obstacle for the Risorgimento programme of Italian unity.⁹³ Moreover, in the post-war period, the Catholic hierarchy was doubly discredited for its dubious behaviour with regard to Fascism. This favoured the moves of the PCI towards Liberal intellectuals, on the basis of anti-Clericalism and what they regarded as a contradiction between their lay, progressive and modern character and their political alignment with the Christian Democrats on the basis of anti-Communism. In the confrontation with the Catholics, however, the post-war PCI, in accordance with Gramsci's analysis,⁹⁴ sought to distinguish between the progressive and regressive impulses of Catholicism and regarded it as a necessary component of the bloc that the proletariat had to forge.

Despite the evident reactionary discourse of the Church hierarchy, a large part of the working population attended mass every Sunday.⁹⁵ Catholicism was part of the national culture and, because of this, the Communists had to reach an agreement with it, if they wanted the Italians to view them as a national force, rather than as the puppet of a foreign power. Accordingly, in the immediate post-war period, the Communists avoided confrontation with

⁹² See Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, 1997, pp. 41-42.

⁹³ See Giampiero Carocci, *op. cit.* (1995).

⁹⁴ See Antonio Gramsci, Folclore e senso comune, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1992.

⁹⁵ See Geoffrey Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

the DC. Instead, before the Christian Democrats made their definitive turn to the Right in 1947, the PCI attempted to approach them on the basis of their former anti-Fascist collaboration. As early as 1943, Togliatti argued that:

'Regarding the main problem of the Catholic democratic and social movement, it cannot recover itself, go ahead and triumph if it does not go on and fight for two essential things: The first one is peace.

The second one is the return to a regime of free civil co-existence, trade-union freedom and political democracy; that is: the definitive end of Fascist tyranny.'⁹⁶

A number of works by secular Communist artists testify to the PCI's understanding of the role of Catholicism in Italian history and society. Alongside a modern technical vocabulary, these artists employed religious iconography as a means to provide a mass audience with the clues for an adequate reading. This is particularly evident in the case of Guttuso [Illustrations 1- 24] and paintings such as Crocifissione (Crucifixion, 1939), [Illustration 1]. Similarly, a number of post-war Catholic intellectuals also provided visions of co-ordinated action with the Communists. For example, Roberto Rossellini's 'Roma, città aperta' (Rome, Open City, 1945),⁹⁷ focused on the collective nature of anti-Fascism, as manifest in seventy-two hours of

⁹⁶ Palmiro Togliatti, 'Il programma sociale della Democrazia cristiana', op. cit. (1979). Vol. IV, p.457.

⁹⁷ See Mario Verdone, Storia del cinema italiano, Newton Compton Editori, Roma, 1995; Tony Aldgate, 'The Italian Neo-realist Cinema,' Liberation and Reconstruction: Politics, culture and Society in France and Italy, 1943-1954, Open University course materials, The Open

the life of the characters. The film shows how the circumstances of the German occupation push Manfredi, a Communist official (Marcel Pliagiero); don Pietro, a priest (Aldo Fabrizi); and Pina, a housewife (Anna Magnani), to fight and die for the same cause: the defeat of the Nazis.

A further proof of the importance of the Catholic question for the PCI is the whole campaign launched from 1946, and during the 1947 elections, to explain the party's religious policy. Posters stated that: 'We assure the Church that the Communist Party is not an atheist party'... because it is not necessary to be an atheist to join the party;... because the majority of its membership are practising Catholics;... and because our party rejects all forms of religious or anti-Clerical intolerance.'⁹⁸

The alliance of Catholics and Communists, however, would be impossible to sustain as the Cold War went on. Togliatti had considered it in national terms, as a particular characteristic of the Italian road to Socialism. However, it had become clear that, from 1948, none of the main Italian parties could escape Cold War polarisation. Since that moment, the Catholics and Communists replaced anti-Fascist collaboration by emphasising, respectively, anti-Communism and class struggle.⁹⁹ In the PCI posters for the 1948 elections,

University Press, Milton Keynes, 1989-1990; and the section 'From Communist to Communion' in David Ward, op. cit.

⁹⁸ 1947 poster for the electoral campaign, reprinted in Edoardo Novelli, C'era una volta il Pci. Autobiografia di un partito attraverso le immagini della sua propaganda, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 2000, p. 38.

⁹⁹ This would make the ideological differences between Communism and progressive Catholicism more visible. For Ward, 'in the return to the Church's original mission [progressive Catholic intellectuals found] a viable alternative model of political militancy.' However, Ward writes that for Catholic intellectuals, Communist militancy was not entirely convincing, as, for them, the essential idea to lead reconstruction was not class struggle, but

earlier conciliatory attitudes towards the church were substituted by frontal attacks. While Christ and the first Christians 'were martyred for fighting for social equality and the liberation of the oppressed... [today] MANY BISHOPS AND CARDINALS ARE AMONG THE BIGGEST CAPITALISTS IN THE WORLD.'¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the Pope was considered an anti-national figure who 'opposed Italian unity and excommunicated the patriots who wanted Rome to be the capital of Italy.'¹⁰¹

As a political adversary of the PCI, the DC was the opposite of the Liberals. Above all, this was because its leaders had developed a clear sense of what mass politics was like: linking religion and politics and combining the use of the repressive apparatus of the State with a constellation of civil associations, corruption and control of the media. The historian Paul Ginsborg has pointed out that, in the South, the power of the land-owning aristocracy had been largely limited since Gullo's period in office. But, after the PCI was expelled from Government, it was replaced by a political mandarinat that controlled the state resources.¹⁰² Conversely, in the North, the DC 'successfully established a mass base amongst peasant proprietors and Catholic workers. And through their general propaganda they made a special appeal to what one of their leaders, Guido Gonella, called in 1946 the "heroic and famished middle class."¹⁰³

'the far more nebulous, idealistic, ideologically neutral and inoffensive vocabulary of Christian humanism.' (See David Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 91 and ff.)

¹⁰⁰ PCI poster for the 1948 electoral campaign, reprinted in Edoardo Novelli, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² See Paul Ginsborg, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

Both Communists and Catholics used techniques of mass communication,¹⁰⁴ but, because of their superficiality, they also perceived them as a danger that could deactivate the combative masses that they had organised.¹⁰⁵ This is one of the themes of, for example, Giuseppe De Santis's film Riso amaro (Bitter Rice, 1948). In it, this Communist filmmaker opposes the values of collective solidarity against injustice, embodied in Walter Granata (Vittorio Gassman), to Silvana Melega's individualism and egoism (Silvana Mangano). However, Silvana is presented as not being responsible for her behaviour, but an innocent peasant girl seduced by the negative values transmitted by American Hollywood magazines.¹⁰⁶

For its part, the Church had developed a network of parish cinemas that amounted to 3,000 in 1954, to which it was added the 'Organizzazione cattolica internazionale del cinema' (International Catholic Cinema Association); the 'Centro cattolico cinematografico' (Catholic Cinematographic Centre); the Rivista del cinematografico and Segnalazioni cinematografiche journals; and production companies such as Orbis Films and Universalia.¹⁰⁷ The Vatican did use its social influence, its network of cinemas and its mouthpieces to influence the film industry and carry out censorship according

¹⁰⁴ The passion for sport, for instance, became an important element of the confrontation of DC and PCI. The cyclist Gino Bartali and others had declared their support to the DC in the 1948 electoral campaign. In 1952, the PCI counter-attacked with a manifesto against NATO and the atomic bomb signed by none less than the whole football National Team. See the manifestos reprinted in Edoardo Novelli, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁰⁵ See Bruno P. F. Vanrooij, 'Decenza e dollari, I cattolici italiani e Hollywood (1945-1960)' in David W. Ellwood and Giampiero Baretta (eds.), Hollywood in Europa, Industria, politica, pubblico del cinema 1945-1960, La casa Usher, Florence, 1991.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁰⁷ See Vanrooij, Bruno, op. cit.

to its conservative moral tenets.¹⁰⁸ Yet, other voices within the hierarchy also argued the need for 'a moral force to counteract this mechanised, arid, passionate-for-sports and cinematographic society.'¹⁰⁹

Despite holding a similar ambiguous perspective regarding the media, the Catholics, unlike the Communists, never attempted to link high culture and political agitation, and organise fine artists for mass propaganda purposes. The PCI perspective aspired to embrace all aspects of social life, but DC leaders made it clear that 'the party is a limited body and does not intend to make or renew in every field. [The DC] is aware of other autonomous bodies with their own rules. These act in different fields at the same time, ... such as the religious society, i.e., the Church..., the scientific and cultural society and the economic society.'¹¹⁰

On the basis of self-limitation, it was possible for the DC to ally with both traditional Liberal culture and the increasingly influential American media industry, despite the Church's conservatism.¹¹¹ It is as if Togliatti naively believed that the DC's anti-Fascism, and its approach to the Liberals, were signs of independence from the Pope while, in fact, they were nothing but a necessity for the alliance against the Left. The Communist Chair had expected Progressive anti-Fascist Catholics to prevail in the DC and neutralise its exacerbated hostility towards the PCI. He became the main

¹⁰⁸ See Ibid. Also, Geoffrey Warner, op. cit.; Tony Aldgate, op. cit; and Arthur Marwick, 'Culture and the Question of Americanisation', Liberation and Reconstruction: Politics, culture and Society in France and Italy, 1943-1954, Open University course materials, The Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1989-1990.

¹⁰⁹ Bruno P. F. Vanrooij, op. cit., p. 134.

¹¹⁰ Alcide De Gasperi, quoted in Luigi Lombardi Satriani, op. cit., p. 4.

defender of the Christian Democrats within the Communist ranks. When other party members objected to this line, the Communist 'capo' answered: 'But no, believe me, De Gasperi and I agree on a host of things, from agrarian reform to trade union unity. You'll see. We'll achieve a lot together.'¹¹²

¹¹¹ See Bruno P. F. Vanrooij, *op. cit.*

¹¹² Quoted in Paul Ginsborg, *op. cit.*, pp. 83.

II TOGLIATTI AND THE ITALIAN INTELLECTUALS

Togliatti declared the Gramscian orientation of the PCI in 1945 and personally directed the party's cultural policy until 1947. Such policy developed the Gramscian thesis that the working class movement should be more attentive to national particularities and draw the country's intellectuals to its organisation in order to become the hegemonic force. However, Gramsci never became a cult object in Italy, as happened to Lenin in the Eastern European Communist parties. Despite the party attempt to offer an integrated interpretation of his work, readings of Gramsci in the post-war period ranged from those Croceans who considered him 'one of them'¹¹³ to that of the pro-Soviets who thought that his theories should be 'translated'¹¹⁴ into Stalinism.

There is no unproblematic continuity between Gramsci and Togliatti's work; rather, the former's theoretical effort and the latter's pragmatism may be seen to complement each other. From 1944, Togliatti played the role of interpreter of Gramsci's thought, but he also led the Italian Communist Party, as Ginsborg writes, 'through an extraordinarily successful transformation from a small group of militants to the largest Communist organisation in the Western world.'¹¹⁵

¹¹³ See Enzo Bettizza, 'Quando Bettino fece la rivoluzione lib-lab', *La Stampa*, 23 January, 2001, www.lastampa.it.

¹¹⁴ Emilio Sereni, *Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission*, 19 October 1949, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Paul Ginsborg, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

The PCI officials have historically stressed this interpretation of the relationship between Gramsci and Togliatti.¹¹⁶ According to Enrico Berlinguer, Togliatti's successor in the Communist Chair, if Gramsci fixed the theoretical framework, Togliatti's contribution consisted in:

'the idea and the building of a Communist party that, due to the wide and capillary character of its organised structure, and due to the enlargement and enrichment of its bases and its social composition,... was not a hyper-ideological and hyper-centralised Communist party of a restricted avant-garde. It was, instead, a democratic mass party... It was a party that [according to Togliatti] "challenges schemes of closed guild-like Classism; a party that rejects any position guided by adventurous and charlatan maximalism. It is a party that does not live on myths; that demands to work,

¹¹⁶ From the assorted anti-Communist front, the opposite interpretation has been offered. The Craxian Socialist Enzo Bettizza has recently pictured Gramsci as a member of an 'eclectic tradition of National-political thought' and not as a Communist thinker. He was an anti-Fascist 'attracted by the Liberal revolution', who stood in opposition to Togliatti for his openness to truth and intellectual finesse. Conversely, the latter is portrayed as a doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist politician. The democratic anti-Fascist current of which Gramsci was a tragic symbol 'would end after 1945, suffocated by the Marxist and Catholic dominance.' (See Enzo Bettizza, op. cit.). Within Left-wing British literature, Perry Anderson writes in Considerations on Western Marxism that Gramsci undertook a study of 'the total structure and functions of culture for systems of political power in Europe' (Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism, NLB, London, 1976, p. 77). Anderson deals with 'the autonomy and efficacy of cultural structures as a political problem' (Ibid., p. 78). This goes hand in hand in Anderson, however, with the neglect of the role of an established organisation in the revolutionary process, which is the cornerstone of Communism. Instead, he believes in a mass movement 'free of organisational constraints' (Ibid., p. 104) and denounces the PCI Stalinist deviation and unfaithful interpretation of Gramsci's thought. (See ibid., pp. 19; 20; 31; and 40).

Gundle holds the opposite point of view, and accuses Togliatti of Idealism when comparing the cultural policy of the PCI from 1947 with that in place in the preceding years of the post-war period. He writes that 'Togliatti was convinced, almost in a visceral mode, that the key for hegemony resided, in the last analysis, in the cultural field.' (Gundle, Stephen op. cit. (1992), p. 38).

in the present, to make the working class the guide of a great democratic and revolutionary movement.”¹¹⁷

Berlinguer stressed that political flexibility was the condition of being able to exercise any real influence in Italian life. The PCI had learnt this lesson while collaborating with the other democratic forces during the war, and this prevented them from establishing a too radical opposition between Marxists and non-Marxists.¹¹⁸ As Ginsborg explains, Togliatti needed to ‘guide [the party] away from insurrectionary temptations (which would have ended in catastrophe) towards a more painstaking Gramscian strategy: deep-seated entrenchment in civil society and a long “war of position” would be the prerequisites for the transition to Socialism...’¹¹⁹

Accordingly, the PCI model of mass organisation was substantially different from the Stalinist one. In particular, the membership policy was very relaxed. Togliatti thought that ‘a political initiative along this line could clear the way for the conquest of a strong influence on those strata of the population that have not joined Socialism yet, but are looking for a new way forward.’¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Enrico Berlinguer, ‘Socialismo e parlamentarismo’, La rinascita della sinistra, Rome, 10 October 1999, p. VII.

¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, as the result of such politics, it has been argued that the PCI renounced the revolution and Ginsborg expresses ‘the...doubt concerned the capacity of the PCI to maintain indefinitely an alternative political vision. The longer the party remained becalmed in the relatively placid waters of the Republic, the more likely it was to be slowly transformed by this experience rather than itself initiate a process of Socialist transformation. As the years passed, so the integration of the PCI into the political system became more evident, and its aims and language more limited.’ In Paul Ginsborg, op. cit., pp. 292.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 291.

¹²⁰ Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit. (1999), p. XX.

In 1972, Guttuso depicted Il funerale di Togliatti (Togliatti's Funeral).¹²¹ This is a monumental work at 4.40 x 3.30 metres, where the coffin of the Communist leader is carried by a crowd in the streets of Rome. There are 144 recognisable faces in the painting that give an account of Togliatti's political and cultural affinities: There are, for example, five Lenins of different ages and a series of 1930s Communist leaders, including Stalin, Gramsci, Dimitrov and 'La Pasionaria'. Also, the Communist filmmakers Mario Alicata and Luchino Visconti, the painter and writer Carlo Levi, Guttuso himself, who gives the clenched fist salute from a scaffolding, Vittorini, who had polemically abandoned the PCI in 1951, but 'who was one of his interlocutors',¹²² as well as other personalities of non-Communist culture, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, who had declared that Togliatti was 'the first politician I ever met who is deeply cultivated and doesn't want to renounce that.'¹²³

Togliatti did open the party to young representatives of European Modernism and guaranteed that the PCI would be a free forum for the exchange of ideas; but he never personally approved certain expressions of contemporary art and culture. Sometimes, he criticised any overly avant-gardist initiatives that he felt could lead to breaches between the intelligentsia and the proletarian PCI membership. At other times, his criticism showed nothing but his misunderstanding of some types of research and artistic expression.¹²⁴ Trombadori reports that he was 'the man that couldn't bear Ungaretti because

¹²¹ At Bologna's Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art.

¹²² Renato Guttuso in Marialivia Sereni, 'Storia di Togliatti', Interview with Renato Guttuso, L'Espresso, 12 November 1972, p. 12.

¹²³ Quoted from a conversation between Sartre and Guttuso as told by the latter in *ibid*. Guttuso tells that 'I wanted Sartre there because there was communication between him and Togliatti' (*ibid.*).

he wrote poetry without rhyme.'¹²⁵ Similarly, Marco Romani writes that 'although passionate about literature and art, and convinced of the need for an open, free culture, which undermines traditions and institutions, which is curious to investigate, which desires to surpass itself, I always saw Togliatti backing obsolete literary and artistic trends.'¹²⁶

It is true that Togliatti thought creatively and strategically, in a context dominated by others' blind fidelity to Stalinist culture; and his points of view were widely respected in intellectual debate. Yet, on the negative side, his cultural politics sometimes took too intransigent a character when confronting minority opinions, and contradicted the policy of openness that he himself had imposed on the party. When he faced an adversary, polemical roughness, merciless criticism, and a somewhat aristocratic disregard for those he considered his intellectual inferiors prevailed in his discourse. He had a style, in sum, taken from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Gramsci. In the circumstances of the Italian post-war period, it was acceptable that the Communists demanded artists carry out their civil duties. However, in many cases, criticisms were misplaced either with regard to the persons they were addressing, or vis-à-vis the method and the limits that should characterise party interventions in the field of art. While this was not a problem when confronting basic anti-Communism, it was when he discussed with friends and real democrats.

¹²⁴ See the polemics on the 'Re Enzo' 'Alleanza della cultura' exhibition in my chapter: Togliatti's Intervention and the Crisis of the 'Fronte' Model, in pp. 268 and ff.

¹²⁵ Antonello Trombadori, quoted in Ennio Morlotti, 'Morlotti spiega la crisi dei pittori,' Interview with Marco Fini in L'Europeo, 17 April 1975 in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p. 250.

¹²⁶ Marco Romani, Togliatti, questo sconosciuto', La rinascita della sinistra, Rome, 10 October 1999, p. XVIII.

Eventually, this led to many theoretical pseudo-problems and unnecessary political breaches in the left-wing cultural bloc.

To this was added the fact that, although Togliatti's leadership was beyond question, the party did not unanimously approve his policy of political and cultural openness.¹²⁷ After the setback in the 1946 elections and the definitive alignment of Italy with the Western powers, the Stalinists gained influence, and dictated the party's cultural policy between 1947 and 1952. Then, the hostility toward Modernism increased, and Togliatti was forced to become the mouthpiece of a political line that he did not really share.¹²⁸

In these years, the theoretical debates on Realism that characterised the preceding 1944-1947 period were put aside; and the practitioners of the traditional fine arts lost their influence. Instead, the party centralised its cultural policy by means of a newly-created body, the Central Committee Cultural Commission, headed by Emilio Sereni, that focused on the organisation of a cultural apparatus to carry on capillary activities in the party sections and to promote explicitly Communist culture.¹²⁹ Such policy continued until a relative success in the 1951 elections allowed Togliatti to regain full control of cultural policy, placing Carlo Salinari, a like-minded literary critic, and not a politician, in the chair of the Cultural Commission.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ See Paul Ginsborg, *op. cit.*

¹²⁸ See Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2000, p. 15.

¹²⁹ See my chapter: 'Emilio Sereni and the Cultural Commission', p. 127 and ff.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

III 'RINASCITA'

Togliatti founded Rinascita in Naples in 1944 with two main objectives: In the first place, he believed that it was necessary to present the intelligentsia with a reasoned 'summa' of PCI cultural policy. Moreover, the journal was intended to serve as a means of theoretical education for party members. In the first issue, he declared that 'the adhesion to the Communist movement of increasingly numerous groups... that belong to the intermediate strata of society and, in the first place, of intellectuals, is one of the most promising events for the future of Italy.'¹³¹ Togliatti added that Rinascita had also 'the duty to give the best militants of the working class and the people the possibility to master indispensable theoretical ideas... to apply the policy that best responds to the interests of their class, their people and their country with a spirit of initiative.'¹³² These purposes could merge by means of an alliance between culture and labour to convert Marxism-Leninism into the country's hegemonic intellectual doctrine:

'The doctrines of Marx and Engels, of Lenin and Stalin, must become, in our country, the secure patrimony of both the Proletarian vanguard and the intellectual avant-garde if we really want the task, now in its beginnings, of redemption from Fascism, of national Liberation and of construction of a democratic and progressive Italy, to be carried out with hope, consciously and with the certainty of eventually being victorious.'¹³³

¹³¹ Palmiro Togliatti, 'Programma di "La rinascita", 'Rinascita', year I, n° 1, June 1944, in Luciano Gruppi (ed.), op. cit. (1979), Vol. V, pp. 43-44.

¹³² Quoted in Gruppi, *ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³³ *Ibid.* p. 44.

Despite these apparent hard-line overtones, for Giorgio Bocca, what Togliatti really did with Rinascita was 'to copy the publications of the finest Italian Liberal tradition'¹³⁴ or, following Santucci, to invent 'a new role for Communist culture in the conditions of Western culture and, concretely, the integration of Marxist culture into Italian 20th Century culture.'¹³⁵ As time went on, however, such a process of integration was put above, and not alongside the second objective, which consisted of the diffusion of theory among the party's base. As a consequence, Rinascita became a publication to be read only by a handful of highly cultivated party members. Rank-and-file militants with a lively interest in cultural issues, such as the amateur Mass Theatre director Luciano Leonesi, comment that 'to us, those who read Rinascita were big wigs. We subscribed to contribute to its publication, but we never read it.'¹³⁶

Rinascita became one of the few sites for a dialogue between Eastern and Western artistic developments. The journal took as its starting point the belief in an indissoluble union between politics and culture, between thought and action, in the perspective of a national Marxism. For its contributors, a popular and democratic art should be the expression of the new historic mass movement born out of the Resistance and, at the same time, it had to acknowledge that these masses were its main public. However, as Trombadori asserted, this did not mean immediately assuming the conventions of figurative painting, or any other stylistic scheme, as the official

¹³⁴ Giorgio Bocca, 'Fare politica scrivendo,' 'Prima', June 1976, quoted in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.46.

¹³⁵ Antonio A. Santucci, 'Togliatti e Gramsci, un ribaltone storiografico', La rinascita della sinistra, Rome, 10 October 1999, p. II.

language of Communist art, that is, 'a work of art cannot be reduced to the narrowness... of an aesthetic theory.'¹³⁷

A genuinely popular and democratic art should represent the dialectical overcoming of Modernism, which was understood in terms of a historic period characterised by the detachment of art from a wider public and the consideration of the artist as a genius above the majority. The Modernist emphasis on technical complexity and the limited social relevance of its discoveries was taken by the Communists as evidence of the status of modern art as the ideological expression of Capitalism's extreme division between manual and intellectual labour.

Even aside from the question of Modernism's popularity, the Communists had reservations about Cubist-orientated aesthetics. Insofar as these could be seen to expose a problematic relationship between the material datum and the mind that constructs it, they could serve as a weapon against long-established conservative beliefs. But Rinascita stressed that, in a period of democratic reconstruction, as opposed to one of opposition to the status quo, Cubist art offered only weak foundations for political commitment. This is why PCI officials proposed instead a realism that was intended to go beyond the mere analysis of cognition and perception to their re-articulation in a grand narrative. Instead of producing paralysing intellectual doubts derived from the fragmentary character of the representation of the world, the Communists wanted an art that could constitute both an explanation of the world and a

¹³⁶ Author's interview with Luciano Leonesi, Bologna, 17 May 2000.

¹³⁷ Antonello Trombadori, 'Ideologia e critica,' Rinascita, II, n° 11, 1945 (a), p. 228.

stimulus for social consciousness and subsequent action to change it. In a 1944 Rinascita article signed by 'g.b.,'¹³⁸ the author criticised Modern painting and supported a socially oriented realism that aimed to show, with a comprehensible language, not only the facts, but also the worldview that these implicated:

"An art of rapid impressions or deformations... will always be a bourgeois art because it will only talk to a few, because it lacks the means to create a real solidarity between itself and the multitude. To become truly popular an artist should aim in his work to attain a worldview that other men could largely share and with which they could live.'¹³⁹

Despite such criticisms and claims for a totalising art, no official aesthetic position was articulated in Rinascita. To reach a clear understanding of what such art should be like was viewed as a future goal, and not as something already found, as in the case of Soviet Socialist Realism which, according to a widespread opinion, could not be assimilated by Italian artists because it was the product of a society that had achieved a higher historic level. As Trombadori put it, 'how is it possible to lock in a conclusive formula that which is still today a continuing search?'¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Many Communists leaders preferred to use a pseudonym, or they signed articles with their initials. Perhaps, partly with the aims to not to hinder the debate with their authority, partly to avoid confusions between what were personal opinions and what was the official party line. In this case, the author is unknown.

¹³⁹ g.b., 'Arte popolare ed arte non popolare,' Rinascita, I, n° 4, 1944.

¹⁴⁰ Antonello Trombadori, 'Artisti e critici dopo la liberazione,' Rinascita, II, n° 1, 1944 (a), p. 29.

However, Socialist Realism provided the contributors of the journal with a series of categories which individual critics employed at their convenience. But PCI representatives in the art world made clear, at the earliest opportunity, that, 'an article written by a critic is not a party resolution.'¹⁴¹ It was not the duty of the party as such 'to dictate to Communist intellectuals either subjects, method, or solutions.'¹⁴²

Trombadori was the paradigmatic Rinascita writer. He was the son of the painter Francesco Trombadori; and had been formed as a critic in the environment of 1930s Rome. In these years, Fascist intellectuals such as F.T. Marinetti, Margherita Sarfatti¹⁴³ and Bottai had already decisively changed the role of the art critic in the direction, not only of academic work, but also of engagement: with the critic functioning as a catalyst between artists and groups of artists.

After the War, Trombadori promoted a Realist, socially-orientated art and the rejection of formal experimentation for the sake of it, but he did not support any artistic school in particular. Instead, he sought to overcome the dichotomy between Abstraction and Socialist Realism that had dominated Marxist aesthetics during the 1930s. In his view, these trends tended to

¹⁴¹ Renato Guttuso, unpublished letter Ai compagni della commissione culturale e.p.c. al segretario del PCI, Rome, 26 September 1950 (a), p. 4.

¹⁴² Luciano Gruppi, op. cit. (1979), p. 423.

¹⁴³ Sarfatti was the leader of 'Novecento'. Originally, 'Novecento' was a matrix of post- and anti-avant-garde elements, that ranged from the Metaphysical intimacy of Giorgio Morandi to Mario Sironi's explicitly propagandistic mural painting. The association acquired a prominent status in Italian art. Eventually, it ended up becoming what Sarfatti herself had criticised: 'Kitsch' Neo-classicism for propagandistic ends, that achieved its peak with Farinacci's 'Cremona Prize'. For further information, see Antonio Del Guercio, Storia dell'arte italiana nel XX secolo, Newton Compton, Roma, 1995, pp. 26-40.

superimpose mental schemes on reality, instead of pursuing a rational knowledge of it:

'Some men, to the extent they are able to overcome the limits of the sterile polemics on the form of artistic language, have found the way to turn to life and to search exclusively in life, always considered as the context of social relationships and therefore as the source of people's passions, as the possibility to find a new impulse and a new function for the art of painting.'¹⁴⁴

As the realism of an artwork was seen to depend on the faithfulness and richness with which it was seen to represent reality, and not on the employment of any set of aesthetic rules, Trombadori could not prescribe what the new style would be like; but he did indicate some mistaken approaches that painting should avoid. Thus, he criticised mass Fascist Nationalist art because its rhetorical Classicism and its so-called 'aesthetics of order and tradition' were based on 'the external aspects of simplicity and formal clarity characteristic of our figurative expression.'¹⁴⁵ Fascism provided a fixed meaning of what a national Italian culture was like and therefore imposed historical schemes on a richer, fast-developing reality.

Trombadori also rejected the figurative style of some late members of the Roman school¹⁴⁶ who, in his view, retreated to the personal relationship of the individual with his surroundings to the detriment of their social responsibilities.

¹⁴⁴ Antonello Trombadori, *op. cit.* (1944) (a), p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁶ See my chapter: 'The Forging of an anti-Fascist Consciousness in Italian Art', pp. 194 and ff.

Fausto Pirandello, for example, was an artist characterised by his acute sensibility for the intimate, the sensual and the quotidian [Illustrations 25-26]. He represented everyday subject-matter according to post-Cubist compositional schemes and yet he claimed to be making realist painting in so far as 'the experiences of Cubism and Abstraction show the problematicity of the times in which we live and, because of this, they are its image.'¹⁴⁷ However, he thought that reality was not separated from the individual spirit, that it was not something objective but the result of an activity of composition, that is: 'the invention of everyone of us about the world that we perceive.'¹⁴⁸

This kind of art meant a considerable advance in comparison to the most regressive exponents of Fascist 1930s aesthetics, but Trombadori's ideal of a social painting sought to go beyond the merely individual and fragmentary outlook. He writes that:

'There is no doubt that Pirandello is a painter who is attentive both to nature and to men in their physical manifestation, and thus a painter who includes an aspect of reality in his aesthetic. However, this is not entirely satisfactory. It is always seems cold and distant. Why? Because it is not enough to locate a series of objects that really exist, to feel oneself a prisoner of their weight and form, and portray them according to a certain compositional taste and with a certain range of colours. This is a Naturalistic way of painting; it is a metaphysical way of comprehending reality, like something contemplated from above, without a historical dimension. A would-be realist painter who

¹⁴⁷ Interview recorded in video at www.Scuolaromana.it. Date and place unknown.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

restrict himself to phenomenal manifestations of reality is nowadays not a realist painter. Likewise, a painter who claims to be interested in content but who abandons himself to an opposition between content and form, is not fulfilling his historical duty as an artist... What matters is a way of being immersed in the reality of life, of establishing a historically definable relationship within it, a social role. It is true that every manifestation of human life presupposes some sort of historically definable relationship with surrounding reality; but only some of these relationships are set in a progressive direction at any particular moment of history.'¹⁴⁹

Trombadori's critical method set out to understand the 'importance and nature of the existing relationship between the work of art, its time and society in general'.¹⁵⁰ Earlier, Gramsci had written that:

'As regards the relationship between literature and politics, we must bear in mind that the writer necessarily has less precise and defined views than the politician... The politician imagines man as he is and, at the same time, as he should be to achieve a given end... The artist necessarily represents "what is" at any given moment in a personal, critical way, that is, realistically. Thus, ...the politician will never be happy with the artist...'¹⁵¹

Taking the separation of art and life as his starting point, Trombadori signalled their reunion as the main task of contemporary art. He accordingly historicizes Gramsci's thought and intends to go beyond what exists,

¹⁴⁹ Antonello Trombadori, ' , op. cit. (1944) (a), p. 28.

¹⁵⁰ Antonello Trombadori, op. cit. (1945) (a), p. 228.

proclaiming the need for a 'great' work of art that would reconcile the conflicting perspectives of the Communists and artists such as Pirandello. He did not reject the latter's painting as such, but he thought that, in the post-war period, reality should be represented in more optimistic and constructive terms. The mere exposure of what Pirandello called 'the problematicity of the time in which we live'¹⁵² was accordingly seen as an imperfect 'naturalistic'¹⁵³ artistic practice, in the face of the demand that modern art should actively contribute to social change. In his articles, Trombadori was polemical against these whose rejection of Fascist art had led them to a permanent retreat from addressing public issues and towards an individualist art that was not far away from Croce's intellectual position. Instead, he asked artists to reflect 'the dominant aspect of the surrounding historic reality',¹⁵⁴ that is: the rise of the popular bloc to the historico-political arena and its fight for hegemony. Nonetheless, Trombadori believed that every art was 'realist' insofar as it expressed a social and historically determined reality. He acknowledged that certain artists were able to express the contradictions and decadence of a given society. The task, however, was to become aware of the means to overcome these contradictions, showing the new vital forces that arise and taking sides with them.

Reservations concerning Modernist intellectual fragmentation went in hand, among the Rinascita contributors, with a stress on the importance of taking into account the new expressive means that modern artists had discovered, in

¹⁵¹ Antonio Gramsci, Letteratura e vita nazionale, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin 1954, p. 13.

¹⁵² Interview recorded in video at www.Scuolaromana.it. Date and place unknown.

¹⁵³ Antonello Trombadori, op. cit. (1944) (a), p. 28.

¹⁵⁴ Antonello Trombadori, op. cit. (1945) (a), p. 29.

order to enrich the content of their work. Nevertheless, they criticised certain artistic manifestations, especially analytic Cubism and Abstract art, because the reception of these styles required a considerable cultural background that the proletariat lacked. This prevented many Abstract artists from becoming integrated with an audience that the journal regarded as the most advanced force of society.

This did not however mean reverting to the conventions of 'understandable' 19th Century painting, as Soviet Socialist Realism had promoted. It was acknowledged that the expressive means produced in the 20th Century were also valuable for the depiction of contemporary life, so long as they were employed to represent reality more accurately, and not to underline the artist's individual outlook. 'G.b.' argued that the Socialist Realist claim that a civilisation-founding art must necessarily be naturalistic had been falsified by art history: insofar as it 'seems to be contradicted by the existence of high artworks outside the naturalistic mentality, such as Egyptian or Byzantine art... Both are very particular mental symptoms born out of a complex spirituality that had sustained nations during centuries or millennia.'¹⁵⁵

As the post-war period went on, the perception of Modernism tended to change within the PCI ranks, and it began to be regarded as a cultural expression organically attached to the bourgeois system. When this evolved into a generalised attitude of rejection, the party's problems with left-wing artists began. Initially, these artists had approached the PCI during the battle

¹⁵⁵ g.b., op. cit.

against Fascist cultural autarky. However, especially in the late 1940s and early 1950s, many voices within the party supported an obstinate and ineffective provincialism that tended to neglect fifty years of art history, and exclusively looked to the pre-Modernist Italian national artistic heritage as the ground of a style appropriate for consumption by the masses.

Hitherto, Togliatti had maintained a conciliatory attitude between the position expressed by Left-wing artists and critics and hard-line party intellectuals. But during the period from 1947 to 1951, he and Rinascita began to demand a more explicit political position, and took part in debates on style far more aggressively.¹⁵⁶ The PCI expulsion from government in 1947 seemed to confirm the views of those who proposed to carry out a politics of full confrontation.¹⁵⁷ In these years, the PCI chairman not only claimed the right of the party and the workers to express collective opinions on art in confronting professional artists, but he also believed in the equation of art and propaganda in every case. He considered that the opposition between Communist-orientated and a-political visual expression did not represent a distinction between something artistic or non-artistic, but between two kinds of art that belong to two different social classes. In a 1950 article titled L'arte e la propaganda (Art and Propaganda), he pointed out the ideological character of those Modern artworks that focused on showing the difficulties of presenting the viewer with a totality. If artists take such difficulties as something fixed, as an intrinsic and essential quality of reality, and not as the starting point of their research, as something to move beyond, they were, in

¹⁵⁶ See my chapter: 'Togliatti's Intervention and the Crisis of the "Fronte" of Artists', p. 268 and ff.

his view, merely producing ideology. For Togliatti, criticism and independent enquiry could turn into the opposite if they a-priori reject political engagement as 'propaganda'. For Togliatti, the political implication would be organically embedded into the genuinely realist work of art. What to the Liberal is mere 'propaganda' is to the Communist critic a politics which 'originates in the narrative as such.'¹⁵⁸ Togliatti stressed that merely 'critical' art could, in fact, prevent the viewer from taking a clear view of the struggles carried on in the social, historic and economic realms, and it could end up justifying anything: 'We do not deny that somebody can imagine making a better work of art by constructing interior metaphysical dramas in the consciousness of an SS executioner or of Pierre Laval. Bunches of propagandists have been doing so for a long time.'¹⁵⁹

Despite these statements, the pages of Rinascita continued to be a free forum for debate; and the journal kept publishing articles from different positions. Even during the period 1947-51, some contributors, such as Sandro Fe D'Ostiani and Trombadori, struggled to maintain openness to wider European developments. Fe D'Ostiani sought to theorise the artist's social commitment based on his own practice and artistic evolution; and not in the 'a priori' conversion to a political creed. He argued in 1949 that modern painting could not be accused of being 'bourgeois' but, rather, of being a failed reaction *against* bourgeois culture. Such a reaction had placed artists in a position of estrangement from life that ended in complete separation and ethical paralysis:

¹⁵⁷ See my chapter: 'Emilio Sereni and the Cultural Commission', p. 127 and ff.

¹⁵⁸ Roderigo di Castiglia, 'L'arte e la propaganda,' Rinascita, VII, n° 1, 1950.

'The history of modern painting is the history of European artists' revolt against the Reactionary and Conservative transformation of Modern society and at the same time it is the history of their failure... Pessimism consolidates itself as the dominant tone of Modern painting, lacking the positive term of a solution... [Modern painting] is blocked in the negative moment: to free itself from Modern society...without finding anything to substitute for that reality apart from dreams and evasions...'160

Fe D'Ostiani meant that Modern art was realist as far as it showed the contradictions and the crisis of bourgeois society. Yet, now, as the revolution spread, it had to be overcome and the artists' revolt against Capitalism should take on a clearer political shape. Otherwise, it risked betraying its own objectives and becoming, instead, an ideological brake on social progress. Henceforth, Marxism was supposed to have rescued artists from their crisis by lining them up with the popular masses and making them realise that a new approach had to be taken. For D'Ostiani, 'the victories of Modern painting were victories against the weakest barriers, against the superstructure. Never against the decisive barriers, against the base.'161 This did not imply, however, a neglect of the formal discoveries of Modernism for the representation of contemporary life. For D'Ostiani, 'all those painters that reproduce reality meticulously...and fall into Naturalist degradation, that is,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Sandro Fe D'Ostiani, 'Pittura e pittori oggi,' Rinascita, VI, I, 1949, p. 43.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

who, in pursuing the depiction of life, give up artistic creation,'¹⁶² were no less anti-Realist.

In conclusion, the position of Rinascita towards Modern art aimed at its reconciliation with Communist politics in an original way. On the negative side, it produced rather schematic distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' art in terms of political allegiances. However, it also avoided Stalinist generalised rejection. Instead, it presented the shift from 'conventional' Modernism to Communist-inspired art as a sort of historic evolution from Modernism's own premises, and invited artists and critics to pursue research on these lines, instead of providing them with an official artistic doctrine based on party resolutions.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 44.

IV THE POLEMICS BETWEEN TOGLIATTI, ALICATA AND VITTORINI

Nevertheless, tensions soon appeared between Communist officials and intellectuals with a party card engaged in the design of a cultural politics. Elio Vittorini's journal Il politecnico, published between 1945 and 1947, was an independent Left-wing cultural review that introduced many international literary developments to Italy. The editor was a representative of the 1930s generation, politically characterised by a diffuse Left-wing anti-Fascism that decisively influenced his work. In the novels Conversazione in Sicilia (Conversation in Sicily, 1938-1939) and Uomini e no (Men and Not Men, 1945), he had examined the relationship between the day-to-day lives of the characters and the meta-narratives of political emancipation, criticising the suffering caused by the blindness of ideologies when they become pre-conceived political schemes that substitute for the knowledge of real, everyday life.

Uomini e no is set in Milan during the German occupation and tells the story of the Partisan captain Enne 2, who risks his life in suicide missions, pushed at the same time by his political commitment and the existential desperation caused by an impossible love with Berta, a married woman, who is afraid to leave her husband. In a conversation with the lovers, the old Partisan woman Selva asks Berta:

'A person is happy when he or she has a partner... "For god's' sake!" she says, "the people need to be happy. What meaning would our work have if

the people can't be happy? Speak, you girl. Would our work have sense?... Nothing on earth would have sense...Would our little clandestine journals have sense? Would our conspiracies have sense?... And our people that have been executed! Would they have a sense? No. No. The people need to be happy. Everything has a sense only because the people are happy. You say it too, girl. Is it not because of this?'¹⁶³

Uomini e no showed the writer's clear anti-Fascist engagement, but, for Togliatti, the existential drama that Vittorini constructed was forced and did not correspond to the reality of the anti-Fascist struggle: 'Vittorini was on our side in the fight against the inner tyranny and the foreign invader... A chronicle of that combat came thereafter, beautiful, but arguable because he does not know how to present the heroes of that battle. The majority of these were men of the people, plain and basic men.'¹⁶⁴

This, and the writer's unorthodox style, had made of him a controversial character within the PCI. The trigger for the polemics was the publication of several chapters of Ernest Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls in Il politecnico. This initiative was strongly criticised in Rinascita by Mario Alicata,¹⁶⁵ who considered the fragmentary style of that novel to be politically reactionary. Hemingway, for Alicata, had attempted to describe the events of the Spanish Civil War, but he had failed to express the political tendency that

¹⁶³ Elio Vittorini, Uomini e no, Oscar Mondadori classici moderni, 1990, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶⁴ Roderigo di Castiglia, 'Vittorini se n'è giuto. E soli li ha lasciato...', Rinascita, year VIII, n° 8, August, 1951, reprinted in Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit. (1979), Vol. V, p. 615.

¹⁶⁵ Alicata belonged to the first generation of Neorealist filmmakers. He had been trained at Rome's 'Centro sperimentale di cinematografia'. Together with Giuseppe De Sanctis and Luchino Visconti, Alicata produced the script for Visconti's Ossessione (Obsession, 1943).

these facts implied. The duty of the new writer was not to make discoveries at a merely formal level but 'to work for a "new" culture. And to work for a new culture means to create and to defend a new language, giving the term "language" not a purely formal value, but considering it as the global expression of a perspective, a taste and a mentality.'¹⁶⁶

Alicata complained that Il politecnico was considering as "revolutionary" and "useful"¹⁶⁷ a writer such as Hemingway, 'whose capability does not go beyond a sensibility of the "fragment."¹⁶⁸ He argued that 'a novel such as For Whom the Bell Tolls, represents the extreme proof of Hemingway's incapability to understand and to judge (therefore to narrate) something that goes beyond a set of elemental and immediate sensations' For Alicata, Hemingway was merely 'an egoist'¹⁶⁹. He posed the question: 'Why should we need, today, an art that is not "human," that does not help the people in their fight for justice and freedom?'"¹⁷⁰

For its part, Il calendario del popolo had published an article by Pietro Sveteremich where he quoted earlier Hemingway's novels, such as Fiesta, as examples of the writer's social criticism. However, this social criticism, for Sveteremich, had not evolved into clear political corollaries:

The same year, he had been arrested in Rome for anti-Fascist activities and, from 1944, he became a major point of reference of the PCI cultural politics.

¹⁶⁶ Mario Alicata, 'La corrente Politecnico,' Rinascita, III, 1946, n° 5-6, p. 116.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

'Hemingway has examined and criticised society; He has looked for humankind's possibility of salvation, but he has only found reasons for evil... He almost finds the critical point of social differences (To Have and Have Not); but he has not overcome it. To do so, he should have undertaken a critique of himself; and, perhaps his latest works, Fifth Column and For whom the Bell Tolls, are negative figures in his account. These show his class shortcomings and his inability to progress, even though he himself says that he does not want to go beyond.'¹⁷¹

Sveteremich talked of Hemingway's novels as full of 'wonderful discoveries'¹⁷² from a technical point of view. However, his concern was that such advances had not taken Hemingway to a clearer understanding of the relationship between literature and wider social and historical realms:

'The point is to examine whether, in For Whom the Bell Tolls, [these discoveries]... lead Hemingway to the elucidation of political questions or not... He sees the fight for the Republic as the result of individual passions or customs of the Spaniards. He is a foreigner looking for adventures in Madrid's political world. In his novel, the identification of social reasons for the war by means of discoveries in a Humanist sense, and the concrete organizational tasks of political struggle is lacking... So the Communists appear in the novel grotesquely deformed.'¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Pietro Sveteremich, comment of Ernest Hemingway, 'Pronto soccorso', Il calendario del popolo, n. 22, July 1946, p. 9.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Alicata and Sveteremich saw Hemingway's realism as unable to specify criteria for political action. Vittorini answered that it was mistaken to try and reduce Modern literature to politics, and the arts into a formula, and claimed that Italian Marxism should return to its genuine road, 'the great open road of philosophy as a search and not the blind lane of philosophy as a system.'¹⁷⁴

The relationship between politics and culture, for Vittorini, should be based upon an acknowledgement of the different nature of both activities: 'politics acts, generally, in the realm of journalism. Culture, on the contrary, has to develop itself, regardless of the laws of tactics and strategy, in the wider realm of history.'¹⁷⁵ An intellectual analysis of the world could not be limited to narrow day-to-day political preoccupations, but the constant necessity to act, which is characteristic of politics, becomes attenuated in the case of culture, whose revolutionary task was to concentrate on achieving knowledge for the sake of knowledge regardless of its immediate implications. In confronting Stalinist culture, Vittorini thought that 'the line that, in culture, divides progress from reaction does not coincide exactly with the line that divides it in politics'.¹⁷⁶ Vittorini went on to warn about the risks of turning art into an 'Arcadia',¹⁷⁷ into the uncritical exaltation of a political idyll, Communist or otherwise.

¹⁷⁴ Elio Vittorini, 'Risposta a Togliatti', 1947, in Fausto Lupetti and Nino Recupero (eds.), La polemica Vittorini-Togliatti e la linea culturale del PCI nel 1945-47, Milan, Lavoro liberato, 1974, p. 26.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

At this point, Togliatti intervened to deny any radical distinction between art and politics. He conceded that they were separate realms, and that politics is devoted to the day-to-day, whereas art and culture refer to more general issues, but he asserted that day-to-day performances have also long-term implications and, precisely, that Il politecnico lacked a far-reaching programme, which had made the journal lose its original progressive character:

'The announced direction was not followed coherently and it became substituted, step by step, by something different; by a strange tendency to a sort of encyclopaedia-like culture where the abstract search for the new, the different and the surprising, took the place of challenging and coherent inquiry, with an objective; and news, information (I mean, with a rude journalistic term, "variety") overcame thought.'¹⁷⁸

Togliatti's intervention meant the end of Il politecnico. Nonetheless, the party chair was keen to emphasise that he was taking part in the debate as an individual; and he stressed the PCI's refusal to intervene as such in cultural issues, in order to avoid clashing with a wider sector of intellectuals. He argued that 'of course we do not believe that it's our duty, as a political party, to renovate Italian culture.'¹⁷⁹ This was a disingenuous argument, however, as many of Il politecnico's readers, and the volunteers who distributed it, were party members. Gruppi noted that 'it is true that Togliatti vindicated his right

¹⁷⁸ Palmiro Togliatti, 'Lettera a Elio Vittorini,' Rinascita, III, n° 10, 1946, p. 285.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

to judge Il politecnico. He was formally right, but he forgot that the discussion was, yes, between free people, but not between peers.¹⁸⁰

Romani underlines that the position defended by PCI officials warned against 'the provincial enthusiasm for every novelty',¹⁸¹ but adds that this criticism was premature. By liquidating Il politecnico in such a way, the party did not allow the journal to develop its full potential and, instead of contributing to a clarification of the relationship between culture and Communism, it inhibited 'the development of a cultural project that, after two decades [of Fascism] rushed to recover the time lost by means of inquiry, American literature and an interest in new artistic languages.'¹⁸² It could be said that, in episodes such as the polemic with Vittorini, party officials did not put their programme of cultural openness into practice with the desired coherence; and precisely that 'American literature' and 'new artistic languages' were anathema to their vision of socially engaged art.

In spite of this, we cannot readily assign Vittorini the role of a victim of Communist interventionism, as he was not only defending the independence of culture, but also proposing a cultural politics according to his own orientation. He had joined the Communist party as a result of his generic evolution, as an intellectual, towards political engagement, and not because of a conversion to Marxist orthodoxy. This moved him to distinguish between Marxism and Communism in a broader sense, regarding Communism as the doctrine of moral commitment and free research that could not be

¹⁸⁰ Luciano Gruppi, op. cit. (1979), p. XCVI.

¹⁸¹ Marco Romani, op. cit., p. XVIII.

encapsulated in Marxist dogma. Accordingly, he claimed his right 'of being myself living water that joins Marxism's living water.'¹⁸³ For Togliatti, however, this meant that:

'There are intellectuals who, when they join the party, they think that they naturally must be the leaders, called to elaborate the highest parts of the doctrine. No doubt they are wrong, because our doctrine not only comes from a secular elaboration of ideas, but also from an experience that accompanied, enriched and corrected the course of these ideas for more than a century... Vittorini lacks quality, and quality seems to mean, for those who essentially work with thought, the capacity of analysis and a general view of the world and the struggles fought nowadays.'¹⁸⁴

Vittorini viewed Marxism more as culture than as politics, and his unrestrained concern for intellectual complexity to the detriment of party discipline was more than the PCI could afford. The party press acknowledged that 'all Vittorini's novels show the spirit of a fighter and a will to renew society.'¹⁸⁵ However, this was not enough to produce advanced literature of the kind the

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Elio Vittorini, op. cit. (1947), p. 25. In English, 'Communism' means a particular reading of Marxism. In non-specialised Italian language, however, the term 'Communism' is often attached to PCI political flexibility and used, not to designate a corpus of doctrine, but, rather, broad Progressive political beliefs, including historic post-Crocean anti-Fascism. In this case, Vittorini seems to be taking the word in the latter sense. As I have explained above, broad Left-wing commitment was the only requisite to join the PCI after the Liberation. In turn, the word 'Marxism' seems to be used, in this case, to designate the interpretation of Marxism delivered by late 1940s USSR intellectuals. Vittorini's earlier-cited quotation is proof of this. In it, he talks about Marx's incapability to 'leave out of his doctrine... the spiritual unity that every Romantic thinker envied in the Middle Ages.' (See page 67) Vittorini lacks a consistent terminology in this respect and, because of this, his writing might be confusing.

¹⁸⁴ Roderigo di Castiglia, op. cit. (1951), p. 618

¹⁸⁵ Tommaso Giglio, 'Cultura oggi in Europa', *Il calendario del popolo*, n. 28, January 1947, p. 13.

Communists were expecting. In Togliatti's words, 'Vittorini came with us because he thought that we were Liberals. However, we are Communists.'¹⁸⁶

While Romani has criticised Togliatti's machiavellian use of his authority in the polemics with Vittorini, Aldo Brandiralli has argued that Togliatti and Alicata were correct to point out the weaknesses of Il politecnico; but they did not finish what they had started, and failed to propose a new notion of culture that could take the place of the writer's alleged disorientation: 'Togliatti could have avoided the employer's mentality with which he vindicates his individual taste. He could enthuse himself and enthuse others by speaking about his own taste as a collective taste, and salute, in this way, the birth of Revolutionary culture.'¹⁸⁷

Brandiralli described the situation as follows: '[Vittorini] had the same concept of the crucial political importance of culture as Togliatti. Togliatti calls Vittorini to class discipline, but, as a revisionist, calls him to discipline in method and restricts his [cultural] breadth.'¹⁸⁸ This would mean a Stalinist approach to the question. Vittorini, on the contrary, does not get away with his Crocean influences and 'screams his passion for cultural breadth'¹⁸⁹ but none of them, in his view, seem to have assimilated Gramsci's original thinking and realised that '[cultural] breadth must be defended by the party. Only in that way can politics and culture unite themselves.'¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Roderigo di Castiglia, op. cit. (1951), p. 616.

¹⁸⁷ Aldo Brandiralli, 'Critica della lettera di Togliatti', in La polemica Vittorini-Togliatti e la linea culturale del PCI nel 1945-47, Lavoro liberato, Milan, 1974, p. 256.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Nevertheless, to issue an official definition of 'Revolutionary culture' was not the political line that the PCI had chosen for the time being. Togliatti knew that to involve the party in such a task was the opposite to the current idea of a fruitful relationship between the intelligentsia and the Communists.

However, he tended to identify politics with culture, whereas for Vittorini, such an equation implied the impoverishment of both: 'If all culture becomes politics, if everything becomes closed, and there is no research, goodbye.'¹⁹¹

The polemics on Il politecnico demonstrated the necessity to define clearly the intellectuals' relationship with the PCI; that is, the necessity to solve the problem that Eleonora Fiorani has defined as 'the lack of a dialectical-materialist conception of the relationship between structure and superstructure'¹⁹² within the party. The point was to articulate the intelligentsia politically without overstepping the bounds of the political sphere and trying to impose a given cultural model on them.

Another member of the Party apparatus, Felice Platone, published an article in Rinascita in 1947 in which he advanced the line that the PCI would follow after that year. Platone argued that Vittorini was using the term 'culture' in two different ways. One is that of a general conception of the world in which everybody has the right to give an opinion. But there is another sense of the term, regarding the question of the political practice of Communist

¹⁹¹ Elio Vittorini, op. cit. (1947), p. 39.

¹⁹² Eleonora Fiorani, 'Studio sulla "Unità" e sul "Politecnico," nel 1945-47' in Fausto Lupetti and Nino Recupero (eds.), op. cit., p. 216.

intellectuals, and here the intervention and co-ordination of the party was legitimate:

'If something can be criticised about the Communist party it is not an excessive and despotic interventionism in cultural activity, but, above all, a certain insufficiency and discontinuity in its work of cultural criticism and articulation with the intelligentsia... Vittorini was right when he claimed for the different cultural activities the right to independently elaborate their methods of research and criticism, according to their specific interests; and when he observes that the line of demarcation between reaction and progress does not always coincide in politics and culture.'¹⁹³

Vittorini himself adopted Platone's argument in 1950, when he continued to defend intellectual independence, but ceased making statements about what Communism was or was not, and allowed some margin for the political articulation of cultural producers:

'In Il politecnico I tried to convince the politicians of the need to acknowledge that, if a part of culture works for the benefit of civilisation and, therefore, can be seen to have a political dimension, another part of culture (the Culture with capital "C" and, especially, poetry and the arts) works principally for truth, for the search of truth and, thus, it cannot be influenced by the immediate exigencies of politics without risking all its sense and its value.'¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Felice Platone, 'La politica comunista e i problemi della cultura,' Rinascita, IV, n° 7, 1947, p. 188.

Vittorini's own practice shows that he intended to be counted within the PCI ranks. But, even so, he viewed his political engagement with the Left as the result of taking his intellectual dilemmas to a conclusion, and not as a submission to Marxism that would cause him to abandon his cultural principles. A more sophisticated understanding of Gramsci on the party's part would have counter-balanced the tendency towards monolithic practices, sloganeering and sterility that he denounced.¹⁹⁵ The debate finished, however, without reaching an agreement, overtaken by the change of orientation of PCI cultural politics after 1947 to organisational rather than theoretical issues. Il politecnico ceased publication in 1947 and Vittorini eventually left the PCI in 1951, although he continued to be related to the wider Left-wing bloc and remained a prominent reference point in cultural-political debate.

For PCI officials, the problem was not a question of freedom of research within the party, but the fact that Vittorini, as an intellectual, was attempting to impose on the party his own reading of the relationship between culture and politics just because of his intellectual prestige. This is why Alicata denounced him on the grounds that he was not only making culture, but he was intending to create a 'current' within the Party.¹⁹⁶ Even after this episode, however, PCI organs such as Il calendario del popolo continued praising the

¹⁹⁴Quoted in [E. B.], 'Partito senza cultura', Il Manifesto, 25 April 1999, www.manifesto.it

¹⁹⁵See Eleonora Fiorani, op. cit., p. 219. In Gramsci, the blossoming of a revolutionary culture was the result of a historic development that Italy had not yet achieved. He was aware of the proletariat's inability to produce its own intellectuals due to its objective cultural backwardness. Therefore, in the earlier stages of the fight for hegemony, the workers had to ally with those sectors of the Bourgeois intelligentsia who found their intellectual commitments increasingly in contradiction with their role as producers of bourgeois hegemony. (See Antonio Gramsci, op. cit. (1975), Vol. III, p. 1771; and Antonio Gramsci, op. cit. (1992), p.40).

¹⁹⁶ Mario Alicata, op. cit. (1946), p. 116.

writer as 'one of the most interesting contemporary authors'¹⁹⁷ because of his ability 'to provoke both consensus and disagreements. He is never happy with merely praising something, but creates polemics.'¹⁹⁸ But the PCI had not issued any definition of Communist culture so far, and Vittorini decided to do so because of his professional authority. He was not criticised by Togliatti for merely giving his opinion, but because he was speaking to a heterogeneous audience in the name of Communism without the sanction of the party. The criticism was not, therefore, an operation against his literature as such, but against Il politecnico as a tool to influence party cultural policy and the rank-and-file. This is why Togliatti risked his privileged relationship with the intellectuals to debate with Vittorini. In fact, the PCI was culturally as eclectic as Vittorini, but it could not openly proclaim it. The Communist Party could resist temptations to control the men of culture. They could even declare themselves loyal to Stalinism while, in practice, carrying on an independent politics. But they could not make this a central part of policy. To do so would have led to even more serious internal splits in the confrontation with the followers of Socialist Realism, as well as complicating international cultural rapport with the Socialist countries.

¹⁹⁷ Unsigned article, Il calendario del popolo, n. 58, July 1949, p. 447.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

V IL CALENDARIO DEL POPOLO

Il calendario del popolo, directed by Giulio Trevisani, was a magazine aimed at a mass readership published in Milan, from May 1945, by the PCI Press and Propaganda Commission.

Despite being a party mouthpiece, il calendario claimed to be politically independent and solely concerned with cultural issues: 'You will look in vain for the words "election", "party", "Fronte" or "Christian Democracy" in these pages... Even though people alien to politics and party members work together in our editorial group, this magazine declares itself absolutely distant from mixtures [of culture and politics], and remains faithful to its cultural task.'¹⁹⁹

Despite this statement, Il calendario was fully involved in the cultural debates carried out in other publications such as Rinascita or Il politecnico. Its objective, however, was not to participate or promote these, which was the task of Rinascita, but to spread knowledge and interest for wide cultural issues among an untrained readership:

'These discussions cannot be limited to small groups of painters and critics. [Art] belongs to the people. The people cannot make up their own painting or opinions in art criticism. However, they have the right to listen and judge the arguments given by artists and critics. To have a deep discussion, some

¹⁹⁹ 'Difendere la cultura della politica', Il calendario del popolo, n. 34, July 1947, p. 242.

basic knowledge of art is needed. This is why Il calendario cannot intervene in current cultural polemics. First, it has to provide a broad background of the artistic antecedents of Modern painting.'²⁰⁰

The editorial line, therefore, consisted in an ambitious educational programme in art history, literature and criticism, which presented the readership with introductory articles, illustrations of artworks and samples of Italian and foreign literature. Publishing activity was combined with the development of a network of 'Calendarist Circles' in charge of distributing the magazine and organising cultural events.²⁰¹ There is only scattered information about the way these worked, but we know that, eventually, they became a reservoir of volunteers who could be mobilised for other party initiatives as well.

In practice, however, the objective of connecting a mass audience with contemporary cultural issues was difficult to reconcile with coherent cultural positions. Professional Communist artists and critics such as Trombadori, Guttuso and Birolli, unanimously identified eclecticism and lack of debate as the main drawback of Il calendario. Trombadori, for instance, demanded 'a more reasoned direction',²⁰² and, going farther, Birolli suggested abandoning the mere delivery of data. Instead, he advocated devoting a full page to a single school or trend, or else, establishing relationships between the new and the old by comparing, for instance: 'Carrà and Giotto, Impressionists and

²⁰⁰ 'Le polemiche su Picasso e la pittura moderna', Il calendario del popolo, n. 53, February 1949.

²⁰¹ See advertisement of the Milanese Calendarist Circle in Il calendario del popolo, n. 53, February, 1949.

²⁰² Trombadori, Antonello, 'Lettera al calendario', Il calendario del popolo, n. 16, January 1946, p. 10.

Venetians... To adopt the aesthetic criterion of plastic affinities [to see the works] within a historical dynamic.²⁰³ Attention to stylistic affinities should be combined, for Birolli, with 'historic and political criteria',²⁰⁴ showing emblematic works by progressive artists such as Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, Goya, Daumier and Courbert. Nevertheless, Birolli warned that to fall into mere apologetics or propaganda was mistaken: 'it is necessary, in this field, to distinguish between the illustration of a historic period, and the pictorial rendering of a historic period.'²⁰⁵

In the event, however, nothing of this was taken into consideration; and the arts section of Il calendario was an aggregation of disparate notes on artists or trends which, originally, lacked preconceived guidelines. Neither Birolli nor Guttuso nor Trombadori played any relevant role, beyond endowing the magazine with some 'cultural respectability', either by giving salutes to the readers or producing some illustrations.²⁰⁶ As an example, the information given on a controversial artist from a Communist point of view, such as Matisse, was reduced to this:

'Enrico Matisse, b. Cateau-Cabréssis 31 Dec. 1869, lives in Paris. Together with Picasso, he is the highest representative of French painting. He led a renewal of painting, giving birth to the Fauve movement (the wild ones),

²⁰³ Birolli, Renato, 'Lettera al calendario', Il calendario del popolo, n. 16, January 1946, p. 10.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Guttuso illustrated the two first issues and Birolli the 16th.

based on the employment of pure colours taken to the maximum of luminous vibration.²⁰⁷

These entries accompanied quizzes in which the readers had to guess the authors and titles of plates by, for example, Carrá, Tintoretto or Bernini, and could win a 250 lire prize.²⁰⁸ Also, there was a section called 'dizionarietto' (Little Dictionary) where artistic terms were defined in a few lines:

'IMPRESSIONISM is a school of painting and, later, a movement or fashion which took place in France during the second half of 19th Century and, from there, spread all over Europe. Its principles consist in fixing, by means of quick painting, simple and attentive to light vibrations, not the immediate forms of things, but the impressions that they provoke in the painter when they are within a given atmosphere. Therefore, the main characteristic of this painting: clear colours, soft forms and brio. The most representative painters: Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, Renoir and Manet.'²⁰⁹

Further:

'EXPRESSIONISM: It is partly derived from French Fauvism, and mainly took place in Germany. German Expressionists strove for a maximum of painterly emotion by means of violent colours. They intended to represent the

²⁰⁷ 'Enrico Matisse', Il calendario del popolo, n. 26, November 1946, p. 10.

²⁰⁸ See, for example, Gabriele Mucchi, 'Picasso e i classici', Il calendario del popolo, January 1947, p. 17.

²⁰⁹ Il calendario del popolo, n. 18, March 1946, p. 10.

essential elements of objects and figures to render an immediate expression of these.²¹⁰

Birolli and Trombadori had warned about the risks of falling into superficiality and snobbery. The same eclecticism that they criticised, however, allowed Il calendario to avoid confrontation with party officials. Unlike Vittorini and Il politecnico, Trevisani had renounced the promotion of any cultural politics, apart from popularisation of the arts, and treated polemical issues in a deliberately ambiguous way. Sveteremitch's article referred to above, for instance, is an example of how elegantly the Il calendario contributors could back Togliatti and Alicata's critique of Hemingway's literature and, at the same time, praise the American writer's 'wonderful discoveries';²¹¹ and even publish a story by him next to the article, First Aid, without attracting party officials' criticism.²¹² In fact, a wide range of poems, stories and extracts of novels from writers of all trends were published, including the Italian classics and 20th Century writers such as Erskine Caldwell, Gorky, Vittorini, Ilja Ehrenburg, Howard Fast, and Italo Calvino.²¹³

'Eclecticism' was not intended to mean, in this case, 'superficiality', but a preliminary work to provide a mass of uneducated readers with an indispensable background without 'pedagogically' imposing cultural schemes upon them. In a 1947 article, Tommaso Giglio justified the Il calendario line

²¹⁰ 'Espressionisti', Il calendario del popolo, n. 71, August 1950, p. 653.

²¹¹ See Il calendario del popolo, n. 22, July 1946, p. 9.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ See Erskine Caldwell, 'Sangue nella fabbrica', Il calendario del popolo, n. 38, November 1947, p. 145; Maxim Gorky, 'La spartizione', Ibid.; Elio Vittorini, 'Una bestia abbraccia i muri', Il calendario del popolo, n. 46, July 1948, p. 254; Ilja Ehrenburg, 'Il leone della piazza', Ibid., 20

arguing that representatives of 'Official Modern literature',²¹⁴ such as Hemingway, 'are unable to free themselves from many negative things of the cultural world in which they have been educated... [while younger artists] have to face less obstacles'.²¹⁵ Giglio made it clear that Hemingway's was not Il calendario's own cultural option. However, the scope of the magazine was to insert workers into current cultural debate by means of objective popularisation, and not in a sort of Communist subculture that was, at that moment, almost non-existent:

'The great work of literary renewal carried out by the second generation [of writers] will be the topic of tomorrow's literary criticism. [However], we want to focus on current literature and, therefore, we have to focus on the older generation. They will be the producers of "official" literature over the coming years.'²¹⁶

Similar eclectic criteria operated in the case of the painter Gabriele Mucchi's section How to Look at a Painting. Mucchi held that 'there is not a fixed rule to judge works of art of different authors and periods. Even though aesthetic principles tend to essentialism and universalism, they change from one period to another and from one country to another.'²¹⁷ Accordingly, Formalism in art and criticism, for example, was not condemned as such, but relativised within a historical framework:

January 1949; Howard Fast, 'La via della libertà', *Ibid.*; and Italo Calvino, 'Campo di mine', Il calendario del popolo, n. 55, April 1949.

²¹⁴ Tommaso Giglio, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

‘Under a given perspective, it is legitimate to judge a work of art from the point of view of composition (form, drawing) and colour... There is no difference between the representation of a plate of apples, a landscape, a portrait and, let’s say, the birth of Venus: in the last analysis, all these are reduced to nothing but flat surfaces limited by lines, covered by colours and organised in forms...

This kind of judgement is at the basis of Modern art criticism and Modern painting. It has its distant roots in the first revolts made by the Impressionists against subject-dominated academic painting, against history painting and genre scenes; and evolved into the radicalism of Modern painting, to arrive at Abstract painting through an increasing abandonment of subject-matter in favour of form. Abstract painting, therefore, brings to an extreme the critical process based on the relationship between form and colour.’²¹⁸

Mucchi warned, however, of the non-contemporary character of such painting and criticism: ‘we think that today’s Abstract painters are just copying forms taken from the Cubists, the Futurists, ...Abstract painters and Picasso. They are formalists because they are working with formal solutions elaborated by others; and not with their own experiences... Before answering the question “what is good in this painting?” we want to judge it “also” from the point of

²¹⁷ Gabriele Mucchi, ‘Come si guarda un quadro’, Almanaco’49 del calendario del popolo, January 1949 (a), p. 8.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

view of its content and its humanistic meaning; and not only from the point of view of the relationship between form and colour.'²¹⁹

Guiglio held that Communist culture was not yet existent, whereas Mucchi thought that it did exist, though it was excluded from bourgeois institutions. Claims for an art based on subject-matter were not the result of an already established artistic programme, but they took the form of a claim for objectivity, as Il calendario considered that Italian 'official' criticism authoritatively neglected new artistic expressions, such as Socialist Realism, which did not fall within 'formalist' criteria. The magazine did not take sides, but only denounced one-dimensionality in Italian criticism and artistic practice:

'For the last fifty years, the spiritual and stylistic education of the Modern artist... points to the concept of "art for art's sake"... Secondly, "official" criticism, purchases, fashion, and the opinion of the critics who make certain artists and styles famous and, therefore, decide the commercial value of the works of art, is all directed to Abstract art, Surrealism and, in sum, Formalist art.'²²⁰

In this context, Il calendario set itself the task of presenting its readership with the widest possible panorama of Contemporary art. Therefore, in successive issues, paintings and concise biographies of Socialist Realist artists were published. In this way, the magazine became one of the very few means by which an Italian reader could know of the existence of artists such as the 1946

²¹⁹ Ibid.

Stalin Fine Arts Prize winner, Mikhail Ivanovitch Avilov, with his paintings of the Russian Civil War;²²¹ the 1950 first Stalin Prize winner for sculpture Eugeny Vuchetivch, whose sculpture To the Soviet Fighters Fallen in the Berlin Siege was placed at Berlin Treptower Park;²²² [Illustration 27] or Demetry Alexeevitch Smarinov, whose portraits 'fixed in the individual the distinctive signs of his social status and the world in which he lived.'²²³

In 1949, the first, 'journalistic' stage of Mucchi's programme was completed. Following that, he set himself to promote a debate on the relationship between realism, engagement and the works of both modern artists and the old masters. For him, Formalism meant 'scholastic imitation of the formal aspects of the work of the masters; it means intellectualistic lucubration and the lack of a real emotion, [whereas] Realism is something different from Naturalism or Verism: this is why it is possible to call Picasso a "realist", even though he is so far away from naturalism.'²²⁴

Mucchi distinguished the opposition between formalism and realism from the opposition between figurative and non-figurative painting. Unlike Picasso, historical personalities, such as the Mannerist Parmigianino, were pigeonholed as formalists, even though they made figurative painting, because of 'the intrusion of intellectualist elements... The colours are false

²²⁰ Giovanni forze della pittura italiana, Almanacco'51 del calendario del popolo, January 1951, p. 33.

²²¹ 'Avilov', Il calendario del popolo, n. 77, February 1951, p. 777.

²²² 'Vuchetivch', Il calendario del popolo, n. 66, February 1950, p. 594.

²²³ In the 1930s, Scmarinov, who had also illustrated Gorky, Puskin and Dostoevsky; had published a book of drawings on the 1905 Revolution and, in the 1940s worked in anti-Nazi propaganda. See 'Scmarinov', Il calendario del popolo, n. 78, March 1951, p. 779.

²²⁴ Gabriele Mucchi, untitled article, Il calendario del popolo, n. 56, May 1949, p. 415.

and the composition is unbalanced.'²²⁵ This is why Mucchi argued that 'realism is not a school or a way of painting. It is a moral position. Therefore, its manifestations change from time to time...'²²⁶

Moreover, realism was 'born out of a polemical attitude, [and naturalism] entrenches itself in the mere acceptance of forms... [Naturalism] turns out to be formalism, because it means a mechanical representation of reality and ends up becoming a photographic reproduction.'²²⁷ This time, Mucchi chose the Impressionists as examples of anti-naturalist artists who 'had abandoned their dusty ateliers and have descended to the streets, theatres and cafés; among drinkers, dancers and cleaners; on the banks of the Seine and the countryside around Paris.'²²⁸

Nevertheless, even though the Impressionists 'had looked at the world with new and pure eyes, free from the tricks and cheats of the profession... [after the Impressionists], a whole series of aesthetic movements that tend to focus on formal values began.'²²⁹ In Cézanne's painting, for example, 'form becomes content; and the object is not important, but only a pretext to make painting. His position is revolutionary, but he remains indifferent about the world... He detaches himself from the world and locks himself in an intimate, obstinate and heroic research [into painting]'.²³⁰

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Gabriele Mucchi, 'Formalismo e realismo', Il calendario del popolo, n. 53, February 1949 (c).

²²⁷ Gabriele Mucchi, 'Gli impressionisti', Il calendario del popolo, n. 60, September 1949 (d), p. 479.

²²⁸ Ibid.

In this way, modern artists, 'as producers of works of arts, have initiated a revolt and do not acknowledge any social responsibility. Bourgeois society wants Academic, naturalist, painting, which is easy to read, pleasant and corrupt. The artist starts a revolt. But, due to lack of ideological education; or class incapacity, he fails to use his work as a weapon for that revolt... Instead, he detaches himself from society, life and nature... He ends up working only for himself. So the myth of "pure art"... is born.'²³¹

In an appendix to the same issue, the art historian Mario De Micheli went further, and stressed that the only way to overcome such a failed artistic revolution was to articulate art with the political programme of the Left. De Micheli pointed to the instrumental role of artists' detachment in securing bourgeois hegemony: '... obviously, the bourgeoisie does not want artists to deepen their grasp of reality because, from such deepening, a judgement on class injustices would be born... [instead, the bourgeoisie] promotes evasion. This is the origin of Spiritualism, Metaphysics, Intimism, Abstractism... Very many people call these avant-garde art. It is not like that: These are a false avant-garde. The only way to make revolutionary art is to express revolutionary content, that is: the struggle and feelings of the proletariat. There is one way only in which these contents can be expressed: by facing and representing the reality in which the struggle is taking place. This is why Realism is, today, the real avant-garde art. Realism is the art of those artists

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Gabriele Mucchi, 'Cubismo', *Il calendario del popolo*, n. 63, December 1949 (b), p. 525.

who [practically and] not only idealistically, have chosen their place alongside the working class.'²³²

Despite having developed a critical discourse on modern painting from 1949 which may be seen to overstep Il calendario del popolo's original scope, Mucchi stressed that the magazine was not anti-modern, but intended to push Modernism forward towards 'a new art, less refined and more popular, which, surely, will be born in a new society, but still will have to take the achievements of Picasso and Matisse as its starting point.'²³³ For the majority of the readers, however, there was a problem with this: Modern painting could be revolutionary painting and, as in De Micheli's proposal, it could treat political questions linked to class struggle. But despite this, the problem of its difficulty remained, and hindered an effective articulation with the workers.

The question of the incomprehensibility of Modern art had been put forward by the reader Aldo Ceolin in an unpublished letter to Mucchi of May 1950.²³⁴ The latter invited other readers, then, to send their opinions about Modern painting and its social and political implications; not without warning that, 'comprehension demands some training.'²³⁵ No professional intellectual participated, only workers whose main concern was the difficulty and apparently arbitrary character of modern art and criticism. For example, Angelo Ferrari intended to make some mockery, and wrote that he had

²³² Mario De Micheli, 'Pittura', Il calendario del popolo, supplement to n. 63, December 1949, p. 2.

²³³ Gabriele Mucchi, 'Dall'Ottocento al Novecento; piccola storia dell'arte moderna', Il calendario del popolo, n. 40, January 1948, p. 18.

²³⁴ See Gabriele Mucchi, 'La polemica su formalismo e realismo', Il calendario del popolo, n. 68, May 1950.

followed Mucchi's advice, and went to a lecture on Picasso given by a university professor at the Venice Biennale, where he heard that 'after finishing a work, Picasso doesn't necessarily know what that work represents.'²³⁶

More seriously, Vittorio Santorelli argued that '... we must bear in mind that artistic phenomena are closely linked to history. Today's society is old, exhausted, and unable to produce vital art.'²³⁷ In addition, Mario Carlini explicitly accused Zigaina, a party member strongly influenced by Cubism who painted political subjects, of 'not having depicted an Occupation of Land, but a mess; a chaos of wheels, flags, arms and heads in a basic way, as my four-year-old brother can do. I lack artistic training, but give me a brush and some colours, and I will make a better work than him.'²³⁸

Mucchi answered asking Carlini to distinguish between 'artistic interpretation of reality and mechanical copying of nature' and underlined the political commitment of some Modern artists.²³⁹ In the following Il calendario issues, artist members of Partisans for Peace, an international organisation against the atomic bomb,²⁴⁰ were listed, including Picasso, Léger, Matisse, Carrá and Le Corbusier.²⁴¹ The aim was to reconcile these artists with the politically

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Gabriele Mucchi, la polemica su "formalismo e realismo" le ultime risposte di Mucchi', Il calendario del popolo, n. 69, June 1950, p 621.

²³⁷ Vittorio Santorelli, quoted in Ibid.

²³⁸ Mario Carlini, quoted in 'Il vecchio e il nuovo in arte, match di lotta libera tra il lettore Mario Carlini e il pittore Mucchi', Il calendario del popolo, n. 69, June 1950, p 621.

²³⁹ Gabriele Mucchi, quoted in 'Il vecchio e il nuovo in arte, match di lotta libera tra il lettore Mario Carlini e il pittore Mucchi', Il calendario del popolo, n. 69, June 1950, p 621.

²⁴⁰ See my section: Emilio Sereni and the Cultural Commission, pp. 127 and ff.

²⁴¹ 'L'arte é un impegno serio... o un giro senza regole', Il calendario del popolo, special issue, January 1951, p 30.

engaged readership. However, bitter and schematic criticism was unleashed in the case of non-engaged artists:

'Some of them become virtuosi and do a bit like those acrobat-musicians from the equestrian circus, who are able to play a violin standing with their head on the floor and their legs in the air. Some others, since they lack arguments or, as the experts say, content to express, invent new languages and techniques. The deeper the meaning of these, the more strange and indecipherable they are.'²⁴²

Examples of these were Jackson Pollock, whose painting was described as 'a mess',²⁴³ or Yves Tanguy. In the latter's Mamma, papà è ferito (Mum, Dad is Wounded!), Il calendario highlighted, 'there is neither a mum nor a dad, but the only identifiable object is a sort of bean jumping on its own in a desert.'²⁴⁴

In Il calendario, artists such as Pollock and Tanguy were presented in opposition to the edifying and readable Mexican Muralists and the Russian and Chinese Socialist Realists. The former had been seen for the first time in Italy at the 1950 Venice Biennale,²⁴⁵ while Russians and Chinese were held, in contrast, to 'celebrate labour; not exploited labour any more, but labour as the expression of happiness and source of well-being';²⁴⁶ or to 'tell the story of the [Chinese] peasantry, illustrate agrarian reform, the fight for freedom and

²⁴² Ibid., p. 31.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ See Ibid and Renato Guttuso, 'Conversando con il pittore messicano Leopoldo Mendez' Rinascita, VI, n° 2, 1949 (c), p. 482.

the affirmation of the Democratic regime.²⁴⁷ To sum up, in the Socialist countries, for Il calendario, 'art has given up formalistic absurdities and searches for the clearest and most immediate ways of communicating the positive content of social change.'²⁴⁸

The editorial shift in the art section of Il calendario del popolo from eclecticism to clear-cut distinctions between 'good' and 'corrupted' Modernists was not only the result of the polarised atmosphere of the early 1950s; or a sort of conservative turn in the magazine after Sereni took office in the Cultural Commission. Gramsci's Prison Notebooks were, then, being published for the first time and, despite problems, the question of the relationship between art and the public was being posed in a profound way in Il calendario. In the February 1951 issue, the contents of Letteratura e vita nazionale (Literature and National Life), were discussed. In this collection of writings, Gramsci had denounced the gap between intellectuals and the people, that is: the lack of an authentic tradition of popular literature in Italy, which, he argued, was not the fault of the backwardness of the Italian people, but of the intellectuals. They had historically held, for Gramsci, an almost-colonial relationship with French culture, whose rationalism expressed a progressive content, but it was foreign culture and, because of this, it could not transcend the limits of small groups to become the backbone of a democratic nation.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ 'L'arte é un impegno serio... o un giro senza regole', Il calendario del popolo, special issue, January 1951, p 32.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Antonio Gramsci, Letteratura e vita nazionale, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin 1954, p.63.

This was the state of affairs that late 1940s and early 1950s Italian Marxist writers perceived as 'Formalism', that is: mechanism in the application of a theory or a style which was not the result of the analysis of national reality, but was transmitted by immersion in official intellectual circles unconnected to social life as a whole. Earlier, Gramsci perceived that the contradiction between both progressive and non-national characteristics of French-orientated culture was at the basis of culturally Conservative criticism: 'This is the meaning of the term "national" which the Conservative current uses in its confrontation with the democrats.'²⁵⁰

However, it was not a question of merely rejecting Conservatism, or the other way round, Rather, Gramsci took up the task of achieving a dialectical synthesis and this was, for him, both a cultural and a political task:

'In Italy, the intellectuals are remote from the people and linked to a caste tradition which has never been broken by a strong politically popular, or national, movement originating from below. They have a bookish and abstract tradition... There is not a national intellectual and moral bloc in the country, neither hierarchical, nor egalitarian.'²⁵¹

On these lines, Il calendario set out to continue Gramsci's project of 'explaining to intellectuals the need to reach the people'²⁵² by showing the

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p.64.

²⁵¹ In ibid. p. 778.

²⁵² 'Che si legge oggi in Italia? Letteratura e vita nazionale', Il calendario del popolo, February 1951, p 778.

people as culturally relevant. In an article of June 1951, Levi wrote that Gramsci's philosophy consisted in:

'A solemn act of confidence in the existence of the Italian people. Taking as the starting point the assertion that art represents the life of a given country; and that Italian art is neither national nor popular, one can conclude that the Italian people do not exist (they do not exist as a people who make history). However, the whole of Gramsci's thought holds that the Italian people is capable of making history and therefore, is capable of making art.'²⁵³

Gramsci's expectations, for Levi, had been accomplished twenty years after he wrote. Before, they merely represented the desires of a politician. But, in the post-war period, 'Italy has had a popular and national movement for the first time in her history, the Resistance, and this is, I think, a great cultural fact... Perhaps, we could consider it as the starting point of national culture,... of an art of which we have already witnessed the first fruits.'²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Carlo Levi, 'Gramsci e la letteratura', Il calendario del popolo, n. 79, April, 1951, p. 874.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

VI EMILIO SERENI AND THE CULTURAL COMMISSION

While publications such as Rinascita, Il politecnico and Il calendario del popolo aimed at producing or popularising culture, or both, the Central Committee Cultural Commission was charged with the task of providing the material basis for such cultural activity. It had to organise the party membership, including intellectuals and the rank-and-file, for the implementation of the party's initiatives in state institutions and society at large.

The embryo of the Cultural Commission was an intellectual section, included in the PCI committee for Press and Propaganda, which was created at the National Organisation Conference of 1947.²⁵⁵ The 1948 Sixth Congress decided on the establishment of an independent, more operational and centralised body, the Central Committee Cultural Commission, and Sereni was nominated its chairman.²⁵⁶

During Sereni's period in office, Rinascita and its theoretical debates were set in the background. Instead, the Communists focused on developing a network of cultural centres, and attempted to organise intellectuals according

²⁵⁵ See Stephen Gundle, op. cit. (2000).

²⁵⁶ Sereni joined the PCI in 1927 at the age of 20. In 1930, he was arrested and condemned to 15 years imprisonment for anti-Fascist activities in Naples. He was pardoned in 1935 and migrated to Paris, where he worked as chief editor of the PCI organ Lo stato operaio. After re-entering Italy in 1943, Sereni was again arrested in 1944 and condemned to death. But Mussolini fell in July, and Badoglio commuted the sentence to 28 years imprisonment. After the Germans occupied the North of Italy and Mussolini proclaimed the Italian Social Republic, Sereni was handed over to the Germans and miraculously saved his life again when he was liberated in August. Then, he became president of the Lombard CLN. See 'Emilio Sereni, presidente del comitato di liberazione della Lombardia', Il calendario del popolo, n. 16, January 1946, p. 4.

to specific trade union, educational or political interests. So far, the PCI had neglected these structural issues, and had concentrated on integrating the traditional intellectual class into the party by means of a theoretical debate on the conditions of their engagement. Sereni also regarded cultural policy as a central part of PCI strategy. Nevertheless, he sought to replace these intellectuals with others of a new kind that would not have to be won over, but would be produced within the party. Consequently, traditional intellectuals tended to distance themselves from the PCI, while the number of mass cultural initiatives multiplied, and a real Communist subculture emerged that, at times, looked like an inverted reflection of the Church's network.²⁵⁷

In a meeting of June 1949, Sereni explained that the establishment of the Cultural Commission meant a clear difference from the preceding period. He accordingly divided the politics of the PCI after the war into three phases. The first one included the period from 1945 to 1946, and was characterised by a lack of co-ordination between the different groups of intellectuals and the Party. The activity was then dominated by 'the thoroughly spontaneous character of small groups in which the semiclandestine style of those very groups before the Liberation could be distinguished.'²⁵⁸ Such a rather anarchic period produced an over-reaction, during 1947 and 1948, when the

²⁵⁷ The historian Stephen Gundle explains that:

'If, for the immediate post-war years, it is possible to study the conduct of the Party on the terrain of culture mainly in terms of the links it forged with an anti-Fascist (or post-Fascist) intellectual elite, account must be taken in later years of the more concrete initiatives that were developed in an effort to institutionalise relations, broaden the basis of cultural action, and root it in the texture of the country. For at this time cultural policy inevitably took a more assertive tone and embraced issues concerning cultural apparatuses...' (Gundle, Stephen, *op. cit.* (2000), p. 48).

²⁵⁸ Emilio Sereni, Relazione sui lavori dell'ufficio per il lavoro culturale, Rome, 14-15 June 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome, p. 1.

cultural policy 'was confused with the press and propaganda work... This compromised our objectives and diverted our work in an agit-prop direction, instead of in an organisational-cultural direction.'²⁵⁹

From 1948, however, Sereni stressed that the Cultural Commission should not concentrate on producing ideology or propaganda, but had an organisational character focused on creating the structure for spreading Communist ideas. In the words of Platone, 'there exists an ideological hegemony of the working class, but it is not really active and present, because this presupposes an organisation that doesn't exist today.'²⁶⁰

The tasks ahead were listed in a 1949 document titled Contro l'oscurantismo imperialista e clericale (Against Imperialist and Clerical Obscurantism). These included the struggle for a culture that was to be simultaneously 'national, popular, modern, progressive and unitary'.²⁶¹ Each of these terms carried a specific meaning: 'national' as the fight against American hegemony; 'popular' as based in national values; 'modern' as a secular and scientific attitude; 'progressive' as rooted in the Labour movement; and 'unitary' as the demand for accessibility for the masses. Another objective was 'the diffusion and valorisation of the cultural production of the USSR.'²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Felice Platone, Intervention at the Meeting of the 'Ufficio per il lavoro culturale', Rome, 14-15 June 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome, p. 9.

²⁶¹ See Palmiro Togliatti, Relazione sull'attività culturale del PCI dal VI al VII congresso, 1950, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome.

²⁶² Ibid.

'Cosmopolitanism' was the term given by Sereni to the attempt to undermine Italian national self-consciousness with the aim of clearing the way for the United States' Imperialist expansion.²⁶³ It was, then, equated to Americanism, which Guttuso defined as a 'tool for the destruction of generically European cultural values.'²⁶⁴ As the title of the document suggests, the promotion of national culture was understood mainly in terms of building a dyke against overwhelming American penetration, and what the Communists regarded as a tendency to erase national cultures by means of products that could be equally sold in any part of the globe. American culture was mass culture, but not popular culture because it did not engage with the people as social and historic entities, but with human beings conceived as abstract psychological entities. It was a kind of culture that did travel, but did not mix and, rather, tended to erase what existed before it.

Moreover, since Togliatti's approaches to the Catholics had failed, the new course proposed was one of open confrontation with the Church that aimed to combat 'Clericalist Obscurantism' with a secular and scientific approach.²⁶⁵ Sereni also stressed the mass dimension of his politics, and argued that he was not proposing a cultural paradigm alternative to that produced in other forums such as Rinascita, but putting forward an organisational question: the need to break with the narrow circuits in which activity had been carried out so

²⁶³ Emilio Sereni, Relazione sui lavori dell'ufficio per il lavoro culturale, Rome, 14-15 June 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome, p. 1.

²⁶⁴ Renato Guttuso, unpublished notes for a speech at the PCI VII Congress, 1950 (b).

²⁶⁵ Emilio Sereni, Relazione sui lavori dell'ufficio per il lavoro culturale, Rome, 14-15 June 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome, p. 1.

far, and 'give the existing progressive culture a democratic and popular orientation.'²⁶⁶

This programme would be achieved by a range of concrete and generic means, including maintaining links between intellectuals and workers and the establishment of a myriad of institutes of Resistance studies, theatre groups, choruses, music bands, conferences, cultural exchanges with the People's Democracies, prizes, art shows, etc.²⁶⁷ Sereni added that the whole of the Party apparatus should be set in motion in accordance with these objectives, along with the Communist councils and the party press.²⁶⁸

In theory, the Central Committee Cultural Commission should have focused exclusively on organisational issues. In practice, however, the need to produce easily readable works with 'non vague, but specific subject-matter linked to the Communist fight'²⁶⁹ was stressed. Although no statements on the form in which this content should be presented were issued, these claims were bound to clash with the experimental effervescence of the late 1940s and early 1950s, and many artists' interest in non-figurative art that explicitly rejected guidance by non-artistic criteria.²⁷⁰

The PCI leaders normally avoided giving names when criticising, but a Central Committee document of July 1949 titled Per la salvezza della cultura italiana (For the Salvation of Italian Culture), stated that certain non-objective cultural

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p.3

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

trends had been introduced in Italy behind a left-wing mask. Yet, in reality, so the leadership argued, 'they express the rotting of bourgeois culture in the age of Imperialism. They tend to spread the germs of division and de-composition in our cultural life. They are intended to hinder its development and undervalue its national-popular character... and clear the way for its colonisation...' ²⁷¹

The argument was that, if modern art was an essentially Western phenomenon; and the West was Capitalist; then modern art was a Capitalist phenomenon. With Socialist Realism the converse was the case. In Sereni's words, 'it is a question of faith. Everything that comes from there [the USSR] should be considered ours, whereas everyone on the other side should be considered our enemy.' ²⁷²

Such a perception of Western culture was rather unconvincingly combined with calls to non-Communist intellectuals to join a 'Democratic and National Cultural Front', ²⁷³ the 'Alleanza della cultura' (Alliance of Culture), which had held its first meeting in Rome in 1948. The 'Alleanza' included people from the most different tendencies: convinced Communists such as Guttuso, Mafai and Domenico Purificato, but also the Abstract painter Toti Scialoja, a Catholic who came from the Roman artistic milieu, and even Massimo Bontempelli, a former member of the Fascist 'Accademia d'Italia' who was a

²⁷⁰ See my sub-section: 'The reaction Against Realism: "Forma 1"', pp. 275 and ff.

²⁷¹ Per la salvezza della cultura italiana, statement of the PCI leadership, 6-7 July 1949

²⁷² Emilio Sereni, Conclusion of the meeting of the 'Ufficio per il lavoro culturale', Rome, 14-15 June 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome, p. 6.

²⁷³ Ibid.

defender of Modernism during the 1930s.²⁷⁴ It was not, however, a cultural group in the sense of, for example, the 'Fronte nuovo delle arti',²⁷⁵ but rather an association engaged in trade-unionist issues and the organisation of cultural events.²⁷⁶

The 'Alleanza' held an openly critical political perspective towards the Government that had been outlined in a First Congress of Italian Culture held in Florence in 1947. There, the participants presented an apocalyptic view of public cultural structures:

'Scientific research paralysed; lack of possibilities for scholars in all fields; University, secondary and primary schools abandoned; state libraries unable to purchase books and non-existent popular libraries; monuments abandoned; music, cinema, theatre left on their own; books and journals have become luxury or corruption items; neglect of popular culture. This is the situation of Italian culture.'²⁷⁷

The Florence congress stressed the importance of popular culture in the design of a cultural policy for reconstruction, as well as 'the people's criticism of old culture and its desire of a new one.'²⁷⁸ However, the support of the PCI for the 'Alleanza della cultura' seemed to be more a question of electoral necessity than a conscious result of the policy by then in place, focused on

²⁷⁴ Bontempelli had been related to Futurism, then, to De Chirico and, finally, to 'Novecento'. He edited the Novecento review and fought the isolationist tendencies of Fascist culture.

²⁷⁵ See below, pp. 264 and ff.

²⁷⁶ See Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.167.

²⁷⁷ Unsigned Article, 'Alleanza della cultura', Il calendario del popolo n. 34, July 1947, p. 226.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

the development of cultural structures within the party, in polemics with the established intellectual class. For the Party officials, its premises were still too generic; and Togliatti had asserted that 'its weaknesses and uncertainties are evident.'²⁷⁹

This was, then, a propitious moment for the Right to make a move and try and weaken the strong influence of the PCI in professional cultural circles by means of a 'good cop-bad cop' strategy. While the Liberals denounced the Communists' authoritarian attitude, the Christian Democrat Scelba called those who attended the Florence congress, 'a bunch of good-for-nothing pseudo-intellectuals.'²⁸⁰ In 1949, Croce called ex Pd'a members such as the ex-Prime Minister Ferruccio Parri,²⁸¹ the anti-Fascist Liberal Luigi Einaudi, the musical critic Massimo Milla, Carrà and groups of Social democrats and Catholics to sign a manifesto titled Europa, cultura e libertà (Europe, Culture and Freedom), where they revived the motif of anti-Fascist unity, by then partially abandoned by the Left. The title of the manifesto paraphrased the name 'Giustizia e libertà' (Justice and Freedom), the name of an anti-Fascist clandestine group of Left-wing Liberals that operated in the 1930s and later became the Action Party and the Liberal Partisan brigades. For Croce, 'Freedom is not a party, but a method that unifies all the independent parties,

²⁷⁹ Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit. (1950), p.3.

²⁸⁰ Mario Scelba, quoted in 'Difendere la cultura della politica', Il calendario del popolo, n. 38, November 1947, p. 242.

²⁸¹ Parri had been the head of Milan Committee of National Liberation and headed the first cabinet after the Liberation in 1944.

those that do not admit totalitarian forms of state, as they are called now, or, as they were called first, Absolutist or Despotic.²⁸²

The PCI press responded inverting Croce's terms. Sereni published an open letter to him in L'Unità where, after mocking Croce's pompous academic behaviour by constantly placing all his titles before his name, he declared himself 'a partisan for culture and freedom' and gave his support to 'Giustizia e Libertà'.²⁸³ Guttuso, for his part, explained to the party membership that 'Idealist intellectuals claim to be defenders of a cultural tradition of absolute "disinterest" for politics in art. But they don't hold such an apolitical perspective any more when it's time to give their small contribution to the anti-Communist cartel.'²⁸⁴ The hardest criticism, however, was reserved for Scelba. Il calendario del popolo denounced him for inciting reprisals at work against Communist and non-Communist members of the 'Alleanza'²⁸⁵ and denounced his 'lack of shame in judging and insulting writers, poets, scientists, philosophers, historians, lawyers, critics and art historians whose credentials and value he is not in any position to understand.'²⁸⁶

External opposition to Sereni's policy was matched by internal criticism on the part of those who had been in charge of PCI cultural politics in the preceding

²⁸² Benedetto Croce, 'Messaggio di Croce per la indipendenza della cultura, 'Risorgimento liberale', 13 April 1948, in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.167.

²⁸³ A month after, Sereni published an open letter to Croce in which he stated that: 'in the vindication of culture and freedom, it is rightly said that there exist differences and contrasts between us. Of those differences and contrasts are made, according to what is said, freedom and culture.' Emilio Sereni, 'Una lettera di Emilio Sereni al senatore Benedetto Croce', L'Unità, 28 March 1948.

²⁸⁴ Renato Guttuso, unpublished speech to the Seventh PCI Congress, 1950 (d), p. 3-4, Renato Guttuso Archive, Bagheria.

²⁸⁵ See Mario Scelba, quoted in 'Difendere la cultura della politica', Il calendario del popolo, n. 38, November 1947, p. 242.

period but had then been displaced. The main argument was that Sereni's passion for organisation was leading to a too authoritarian policy.

Trombadori, for example, warned that demanding artists should work according to the PCI's political goals contradicted attempts to organise a wide alliance for the arts:

'We must have this clear in our minds: the others cannot be, for us, mere instruments that sign manifestos whenever we ask them. They are different elements, linked to us by means of a front and, of course, they don't have to think like us in every case. They must be as they are. This is the only condition under which a front can exist.'²⁸⁷

The philosopher Antonio Banfi added that the problems regarding the relationship of the PCI with a wide association of progressive artists originated in Sereni's erroneous equation of Modern art and Capitalism. He agreed that certain elements of avant-garde culture were 'decadent' and 'bourgeois'.²⁸⁸ However, other sectors were 'progressive'²⁸⁹ and, therefore, were potential allies of the Communists.

Despite Banfi and Trombadori's attempts to moderate the current policy, the relationship of the Cultural Commission with both Communist and non-Communist professional artists became more difficult. This accompanied

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Antonello Trombadori, Intervention at the meeting of the 'Ufficio per il lavoro culturale', Rome, 14-15 June 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome, pp. 6-7.

Sereni's evident lack of judgement regarding his ability to carry out certain concrete activities, which eventually led to his almost total isolation. Yet despite this, the establishment of the Cultural Commission did not provoke a flight of professional intellectuals from the PCI. These still exercised a powerful influence on the Party's politics; and the politicians who supported them found ways to block Sereni's initiatives to the extent that, in certain fields, his authority was a purely formal one. For instance, he managed to make the PCI approve a resolution that called on Communist artists to boycott the 1950 Venice Biennale, in accordance with a similar decision taken by the Soviet Union in 1948, and which had been followed by Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Poland that year.²⁹⁰

Moreover, a number of artists had strongly complained about the way in which the Italian entrants had been chosen. Rules stated that Italian artists could attend either if they were personally invited; or if they had exhibited at least in two national and three international major exhibitions, providing that the proposed works were accepted by an 'ad hoc' committee.²⁹¹ Amazingly, this meant in practice, in 1950, that only artists with an established career under Fascism would be accepted. Moreover, works by the latter group of artists were reduced to a maximum of 150 in total; and they could not be bigger than

²⁸⁸ Antonio Banfi, Intervention at the meeting of the 'Ufficio per il lavoro culturale', Rome, 14-15 June 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome, p. 8.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ See Catalogo XXIV esposizione arti visive, Biennale di Venezia, La Biennale di Venezia Ente Autonomo, Venezia, 1948, Vol. I and II; and Catalogo XXV esposizione arti visive, Biennale di Venezia, La Biennale di Venezia Ente Autonomo, Venezia, 1950, Vol. I and II.

²⁹¹ In 1948 this, in practice, meant artists with an established career during Fascism.

one square metre.²⁹² This was too centralised a system in the view of many Left-wing artists because it left the main decisions in the hands of the 'Biennale' Committee, presided over by Giovanni Ponti and advised by Rodolfo Pallucchini. They were 'the Supreme Court, the unappealable and unfathomable judge who determines value,' on the words of a Giornale dell'arte contributor called C.J.Emmanuel.²⁹³ In December 1947, before the show began, 'Groups of Milanese and Piedmontese artists' had telegraphed Guido Gonella, the Minister of Public Education, stating that:

'Rules of the Venice "Biennale" and other competitions seen - Surprised by commissions always composed by the same people - Tendency characteristic of twenty years of Fascism - We complain - System opposed to democracy - We want new commission representative of all trends - Reform of the rules and return to pre-Fascist system - End of one-man shows by living artists - One-man shows by well-known dead artists stop. We look forward resolute intervention against illegal-Favouritism-Impositions.'²⁹⁴

For these reasons, the Giornale dell'arte newspaper denounced the fact that 'the forthcoming Venice Biennale is completely booked by artists who are well-regarded and in tune with the oligarchy who manages the show';²⁹⁵ and proposed instead the establishment of several regional committees, open to different artistic sensibilities, which would chose only one work of art per artist.

²⁹² C.J. Emmanuel, 'Per l'equità e la giustizia, note al regolamento della XXIV Biennale veneta', Giornale dell'arte, Milan, 12 January 1948.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Quoted in Walter Magnavacchi, 'Ancora dalla XXIV Biennale. Fino a quando?' Giornale dell'arte, Milan, 31 January 1948.

The Giornale dell'arte also complained that the whole process of selection, including the shipment of works, had to be paid for by the artists themselves. But very few people could afford such expenses in the ruined post-war Italy.²⁹⁶

The above articles were intended to promote young artists and defend them from the artistic establishment.²⁹⁷ Further polemics were started by individual established artists. De Chirico took the Biennale to court for organising a one-man show of him without his consent.²⁹⁸ In addition, Severini stated in the Milano sera newspaper that he had been told that there was no room in the Biennale premises and he only could show four paintings:

'Making such excuses, they gave walls and wide spaces to those who... are travelling paths which I travelled forty years ago... [The 1948 'Biennale'] is irrelevant for the historic development of art and for younger artists. They, and me, can certainly afford to ignore the 'Biennale', which, one day, might become a nice cemetery, if it is reduced to the people that the majority of the commission is promoting.'²⁹⁹

In such a climate, Sereni might have thought to use criticisms of the 'Biennale' as the starting point for a sort of revolt of artists against State-sponsored

²⁹⁵ See C.J. Emmanuel, 'Per l'equità e la giustizia, note al regolamento della XXIV Biennale veneta', Giornale dell'arte, Milan, 12 January 1948.

²⁹⁶ See *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ See also, for example, Aldo Rabolini, *Giustizia nell'arte*, L'Umanità, Milan, 27 November 1947; Ugo Bocato, 'Ancora per la XXIV Biennale', Giornale dell'arte, Milan, 12 January 1948; Andrea Da Venezia, 'Motivi... La XXIV Biennale Veneziana', Corriere degli artisti, Milan, 10 January 1948; and Raffaele De Grada, 'Dio ti vede Picasso no. A Venezia ha stravinto il partito della pittura pura', Domenica del corriere, Milan, 15 July 1948.

²⁹⁸ See 'Il pittore De Chirico intenta causa alla Biennale', 24 ore, Milan, 6 July 1948.

events. But he was unable to achieve consensus within the party to take artists' criticism further. Il calendario del popolo did not openly attack the 'Biennale'. Instead, it offered merely informative notes about the artists and the works exhibited.³⁰⁰ Mucchi acknowledged that 'some of these artists are still engaged in formalism; some others are even Abstract artists; some others are close to Realism, but with faulty works.'³⁰¹ However, he underlined that '[the evolution towards Realism] could not be achieved in a year', and wanted a more political and less radical approach to this question.

Guttuso carried out stronger opposition to Sereni's policy. He controlled a sub-Commission of Fine Arts within the Cultural Commission which he intended to use for gaining control of the fine arts sections of the party press. However, in practice, this body met very seldom and lacked any means or responsibilities.³⁰²

In this situation, a meeting of Communist artists and critics was held in September 1949, outside the sub-Commission or any other PCI body. They decided on: 'the participation of the Communist artists in the "Biennale" in a coherent way and with paintings of realist content.'³⁰³ As Guttuso later explained in an internal report to Sereni and Togliatti, a boycott would do nothing but make it easier 'for the Formalist hierarchy to influence the

²⁹⁹ Gino Severini, 'Lo spazio col contagocce', Milano sera, Milan, 17 July 1948.

³⁰⁰ See, for example, Mucchi's articles 'Si é aperta la XXV esposizione internazionale d'arte a Venezia', Il calendario del popolo, n. 70, July 1950, p. 639; and 'Sguardo alla XXV Biennale', Ibid., n. 71, August 1950, p. 653.

³⁰¹ Gabriele Mucchi, 'XXV Biennale. Verso il realismo', Ibid., p. 674.

³⁰² See Renato Guttuso, *op. cit.* (1950) (a) pp. 1-2.

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 1.

public.'³⁰⁴ Moreover, they demanded a say in the party press which, in their view, was dominated 'by laziness and incapacity.'³⁰⁵ They also were determined 'to unmask reactionary positions in art to the extent that it is possible in the current situation.'³⁰⁶ They further reminded Togliatti that the political articulation of artists with the Communist Party required a long process, and authoritarian interventions were not of any help. Even though these latter were supposed to express personal opinions, the problem was that: 'precisely because there are no resolutions from the General Secretary regarding this issue, [these statements] are unlawfully becoming directives.'³⁰⁷

Guttuso subsequently wrote an article for L'Unità in which he explained the point of view of the artists. But the article was never published. As a consequence, he and Trombadori ceased attending meetings and openly campaigned against Sereni. In the 1950 IV Congress of the Roman Federation, he argued that there were Roman artists who, though unconnected to the PCI, were taking critical positions regarding the overwhelming influence of the Church in the Roman cultural institutions. He acknowledged that these were still attached to certain negative bourgeois perspectives, but self-criticism by the party was also needed: 'Let's examine how often the sectarian positions of some comrades, and their prejudices and schematic thinking, prevent alliances that can be objectively achieved on the basis of criticism of the establishment.'³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.8.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

³⁰⁷ See Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1950) (a), p. 4.

³⁰⁸ Renato Guttuso, Unpublished Speech at the 1950 Fourth Congress of the Roman Federation of the PCI, Guttuso Archive, Bagheria, 1950 (c).

Another major problem was Sereni's inability to make PCI deputies conform to the official party line. There is no information available about the Cultural Commission's proposals in the Chamber of Deputies, which suggests a total lack of communication between Sereni and Concetto Marchesi, the head of the Communist group of deputies at the Chamber of Deputies' Commission for Education and Fine Arts. Marchesi attended only one meeting of the Cultural Commission. While there he started a heated polemic with Sereni, when he argued that it was a mistake to create 'a Communist group for the arts instead of a group of Communist artists.'³⁰⁹ For him, the Party ought to concentrate on promoting free debates, instead of imposing subjects according to political objectives. To this, Sereni answered that 'the Communists are always Communists. Therefore, in art too, they have the commitment to carry out a cultural struggle.'³¹⁰

In theory, it was foreseeable that Communist MPs would pressure the government to back cultural initiatives and issue laws with a Left-wing content. Yet, in practice, despite quarrels due to the banning of exhibitions,³¹¹ the Chamber's Commission ran rather smoothly. All parties collaborated to dismantle the former Fascist institutions and recover works of art stolen during the War; and the PCI voted for financial and material support because of the

³⁰⁹ see the records of the meeting of the Central Committee Cultural Commission on 19 October 1949 and 25 January 1950, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome, pp. 4-5.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ See my section: "'The New Party': Between the Defeat of Fascism, the Crisis of Liberalism and the Hegemony of the Church', pp. 49 and ff.

professional merits of the applicants, and not on the basis on their political allegiance.³¹²

Sereni's problems with top party officials and representatives of Italian left-wing culture contrast with the success of his policy among the rank-and-file.³¹³

By 1950, he had developed a sophisticated cultural apparatus that ranged from the Gramsci Institute, which was trusted to his long-standing collaborator, the historian Donini,³¹⁴ to publishing houses,³¹⁵ 'Calendarist

³¹² See the records of the Congress of Deputies Commission VI for Education and Fine Arts from 1948. The Fascist 'Reale accademia d'Italia' (Royal Italian Academy) had been suppressed in 1944, and substituted by the Accademia dei Lincei (laws number 359 and 363 of 28 September 1944). In 1949, the Istituto di studi romani (Institute for Roman Studies) was also suppressed. However, the Roman 'Quadriennale', created in 1928, was maintained, as it filled a gap in the system of State prizes (See Records of the Meeting of the Commissione VI Istruzione e Belle arti of the Congress of Deputies, Library of the Congress, 27 September 1949, p. 81). Another task of the VI Parliamentary Commission was to monitor the recovery of works of art stolen by the Nazis. After the division between the South and the occupied North, Hermann Goering and Adolf Hitler himself gave specific instructions to take a number of artworks to Germany. A section for the fine arts was then created within the CLN counter-intelligence agency (See *Ibid.*, pp. 43-46). The first success of this unit was to impede the robbery of Fra Angelico's *Annunciazione* (see *ibid.*), but Naples National Museum, for example, was emptied before the Allies arrived. The majority of these works were returned after the war. An exhibition was held at Rome's Farnesina Palace in 1947 that included a Roman Apollo, the *Resting Hermes*, Raffaello Sanzio's *Madonna del divino amore*, Sebastiano Del Piombo's *Madonna del vero*, and *La sacra confessione*, as well as several works from the Flemish School and many pieces from Pompeii. (*Ibid.*) A more complicated task was to establish whether other artworks which had been in private hands were sold voluntarily or under threat. For example, Prince Lancellotti requested the return of a Roman copy of Myron's *Discobol* that, he argued, he was forced to sell to Hitler. Eventually, the State took possession of these pieces and none of them were returned to their original owners. (See the Records of the Meeting of the Commissione VI Istruzione e Belle arti of the Congress of Deputies, Library of the Congress, 10 October 1949, p. 86 and ff.). Many other works were handed over by the Allied Military Government of Germany over the following years, Leonardo da Vinci's *Leda* among them. However, after a Sebastiano Del Piombo appeared in the United States, the deputies complained that the Americans were also smuggling pieces (*Ibid.*)

³¹³ Overall, the PCI constituency was closer to Sereni's tenets than to Guttuso, Trombadori and Banfi, to the extent that some party cells refused to purchase books for their libraries that were not 'Communist enough', including those published by *Rinascita*. For further information, see the Records of the Central Committee Cultural Commission on 19 October 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome.

³¹⁴ Donini had worked with Sereni since their Parisian exile, first in *Lo stato operaio* and, after the war, in the international congresses of intellectuals and the Partisans for Peace. (See above p. 146) Originally, the Gramsci Institute was a Foundation with a library on working class studies. It also awarded yearly prizes for Gramsci studies and organised competitions for essays, theatre, poetry, film, novel and research on state social services in any European country. See *Il calendario del popolo* n. 38, November 1947, p. 191.

circles' and a network of at least 33 local cultural commissions.³¹⁶ All these elements could be set in motion at the same time to carry out a centralised policy based on mass campaigns. These included, for example, the Month of School, People's Book and Popular Culture, an annual event that involved Il Calendario del popolo, the trade unions, the Gramsci Institute and party and independent intellectuals, such as the Modernist art critics Roberto Longhi and Bontempelli, the archaeologist Ranuccio Bianchi Bardinelli and Levi.³¹⁷ An Italian Federation of People's Libraries was set up and a handbook on how to organise a people's library was edited, which led to 752 registered people's libraries in 1951.³¹⁸ This accompanied other encouraging initiatives, such as prizes to the best librarian, the best people's library, the best Southern people's library, the province with the highest number of people's libraries, the best article on popular culture and the best adaptation to a script for a mass theatre performance.³¹⁹ In addition, thousands of books were distributed with the help of a whole army of volunteers from the Calendarist Circles in four separate one-week campaigns targeting workers, peasants, the youth and the

³¹⁵ For instance, the *Universale economica* for classic writers such as Voltaire and Balzac and the *Edizioni cultura nuova* for popular culture. This was completed with an agreement with the editor Luigi Einaudi for the edition of the 'Scientific and Literary Collection', which focused in contemporary authors such as Howard Fast and his *Clarkton*.

³¹⁶ See the Records of the meeting of the Central Committee Cultural Commission on 19 October 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome. The local Cultural Commissions were far more active in Central and Northern Italy, in Tuscany and the Emilia-Romagna, than in the South, where the PCI was unable to structure an organisation. Most of the activity in the 'Mezzogiorno' was of a top-down sort, designed and implemented from Rome, and not the result of the work of the weak Party cells, which had enough trouble protecting themselves from the landowners' and Mafia's terrorist attacks. See footnote 29.

³¹⁷ For information about the Month of the Book, see, for example, Il calendario del popolo issues n. 65, January 1950, p. 546; n. 67, March 1950, p. 643; n. 70, June 1950, p. 643.

³¹⁸ See Rino dal Sasso 'Mese del libro 1951', *Ibid.*, n. 79, April 1951.

³¹⁹ See, for example, *Ibid.*, issue 74, November 1950, p. 714.

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³¹⁸ See Rino dal Sasso 'Mese del libro 1951', *Ibid.*, n. 79, April 1951.

³¹⁹ See, for example, *Ibid.*, issue 74, November 1950, p. 714.

illiterate. The 1951 Month of the Book also ended with a 'Battle for the Book' with a book fair and a conference on libraries and popular culture.³²⁰

Also in 1950, the 'Little Rinascita Library', directed by Gastone Manacorda, was set up in partnership with the Moscow Foreign Languages publishing house, with an educational programme in Marxist history and theory. It included a history of the Soviet Communist party; Stalin's Principles of Leninism, and Engels' Socialism Utopian and Scientific and Concerning the History of a Communist League. Also, Togliatti edited and introduced an edition of the Communist Manifesto.³²¹ Other specialised publishing houses were the 'Edizioni di cultura sociale', for non-Communist authors such as Voltaire, Diderot, Darwin or Molière; and the 'Edizioni cultura nuova' for studies in popular culture.³²²

Another successful activity was 'The Cultural Olympic Games' held in Genoa between December 1949 and January 1950. It included the 'Choruses Olympic Games'³²³ and a Week of Contemporary Culture with prizes for poetry (1000 entries); stories (413 entries), musical compositions (84 entries), theatre plays (54 entries), and fine arts (1500 entries).³²⁴ The art prize counted on the help of Guttuso, Banfi, Quasimodo and Bontempelli. It was awarded to Giansisto Gasperini and Claudio Astrologo. This was completed

³²⁰ See Rino dal Sasso, 'Mese del libro 1951', *ibid.*, n. 79, April 1951.

³²¹ For a detailed account of the activities during the Month of the Book, see the unsigned article 'Mese per la scuola, il libro e la cultura popolare', *ibid.*, n. 65, February 1950, p. 562. Also, the 'Manifesto del mese per la scuola, del libro e della cultura popolare' in *ibid.*

³²² See 'Mese per la scuola, il libro e la cultura popolare', Il calendario del popolo, n. 64, January 1950, p. 562.

³²³ See 'Olimpiadi della cultura', Il calendario del popolo, n. 67, March 1950, p. 578.

³²⁴ See Il calendario del popolo, n. 76, January 1951, p. 762.

with an exhibition of young artists with 1000 entries, a Penelope and Mucchi initiative held in 1949 in the Basilicata city of Potenza.³²⁵

The biggest success of the Cultural Commission among professional intellectuals was to achieve a generalised support for the movement against atomic weapons and to engage many of them in debates with their counterparts from the Eastern bloc. In 1949, Ehrenburg invited Hemingway, Roger Martin du Gard, J.B. Priestley, Caldwell, André Chamson, John Steinbeck and Alberto Moravia to join a campaign for peace. This became the embryo of the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace, held annually in Wroclaw (1948), Paris (1949) and Warsaw (1950). Sereni headed the Italian delegation that attended the first meeting, composed of forty people including Donini; Vittorini; Bianchi Bardinelli; the philosophers Banfi and Cesare Luporini, and Guttuso, who presided over the assembly together with other international figures.³²⁶

These congresses allowed intellectuals from both sides of the recently created blocs to get in touch and hold debates from an international perspective. At the request of Donini, the spokesman of the Italian delegation, the meeting took a permanent form by electing a Committee of Co-ordination of the World Movement of Intellectuals for Peace composed, among others, by Guttuso, Sereni, Aragon, Pablo Neruda, Jorge Amado, Irene Joliot-Curie and Alexander Fadeev.

³²⁵ See the Records of the meeting of the Central Committee Cultural Commission on 19 October 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome.

In Wroclaw, Guttuso made general calls for political engagement, arguing that 'artists cannot make art in the same way as if this world was at peace,... as if everybody were free to be a real human being, and there were no racial prejudices, as if there were no executions in Spain, Greece, Vietnam and Palestine, as if the peoples were free and collaborated in peace.'³²⁷ The Soviets, however, intended to go much further and presented the struggle for peace in terms of a confrontation between cultural-political totalities. In his speech, Fadeev, the chair of the Soviet Writer's Trade Union and winner of the Stalin Prize for letters, named the American writers John Dos Passos and Eugene O'Neil as examples of a culture that 'had placed on a pedestal schizophrenics, morphine addicts, sadists, provocateurs and degenerates, spies and gangsters.'³²⁸

Sereni held a similar view. In an open letter published in Il calendario del popolo in January 1951, he stated that 'the Warsaw Congress has pointed out one of the main tasks in the struggle for peace: the identification of aggression and the aggressor.'³²⁹ By omitting systematically any criticism of political and cultural Stalinism and charging the United States with the responsibility for the Cold War, Sereni failed to overcome the divisive 'bloc logic' that other intellectuals who attended the meeting were committed to surpass. Some of these, for their part, were taking sides against Russian lack of tolerance in

³²⁶ See Renato Guttuso, 'Le rovine di Wroclaw gridano al mondo: Pace!', L'Unità, 28 October 1948 (a), p. 3; and Nello Ajello, op. cit., pp. 234-242.

³²⁷ Renato Guttuso, op. cit., 1948 (a), p. 3

³²⁸ Fadeev, Alexander, quoted in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.238.

³²⁹ The Partisans for Peace also offered a prize of 20,000 lire for an essay on 'The Peoples' Struggle for Peace Yesterday and Today' (See Emilio Sereni, 'La cultura per la pace, la

quite an intolerant way. An important case in point was Aldous Huxley, who, for Guttuso, had shown unacceptable behaviour in Wroclaw, not for holding a critical view of the Soviet Union, but for undermining any kind of agreement.³³⁰

The Soviets' view of American culture could not find support either among Italian intellectuals such as Vittorini, the man who introduced Hemingway to Italy, or others who had experienced Fascism. The 1950s idea of the United States was linked to cultural consumerism, militarism and McCarthyism. Yet, many Italian intellectuals thought that there was more to it; and knowledge of cultural developments from across the Atlantic could help to counter-balance the persistent tendency towards closed populism, provincialism and propaganda that Italian culture had suffered under Fascism. The art historian Giulio Carlo Argan, for example, explains that the international cultural role of the United States should not be underrated. For Argan, when the Fascists achieved power in many countries and the Germans invaded almost the whole of Europe, America had become one of the few refuges left for persecuted intellectuals: 'the reservoir of the values of intelligence and culture in the name of democracy.'³³¹

Ehrenburg was one of the few exponents of Soviet culture who still shared this view and sought to moderate Fadeev's policy of confrontation. He stressed that Soviet intellectuals had nothing against American culture, but

tradizione democratico-popolare contro di la guerra, una lettera del senatore Emilio Sereni, un concorso', Il calendario del popolo, n. 76, January 1951, p. 762).

³³⁰ Renato Guttuso, 'Io non tolsi la parola a Huxley come egli la tolse a Ehrenburg, appunti sul congresso di Wroclaw', Unpublished Notes on the Wroclaw Congress, 1948 (b), Guttuso archive, Bagheria.

³³¹ Giulio Carlo Argan, L'arte moderna 1770/1970, Florence, Sonzoni, 1970, p. 620.

were just criticising what they viewed as the Imperialist cultural politics of the American Government. Following Fadeev's intervention at Wroclaw, he declared that 'I am far away from Chauvinism: I know that there are very good things in America: great researchers, writers, architects, etc. However, the policy towards Europe is not directed by them, but by the worst representatives of American pseudo-civilisation... We respect the intellectual values of America by rejecting the ferocity of Southern landowners,... the cult of dollar and Racist hate unleashed to the conquest of Western countries. The Yankees bring with them neither Einstein, nor Faulkner, nor Fast, nor Chaplin, but low-brow yellow novels and low-brow gangster films. These are the new opium of the people.'³³²

Ambiguous visions of American culture such as this survived in the minds of many Left-wing Italian intellectuals during the post-war period. Sereni, in turn, was convinced of the superiority of Soviet culture, Realist and engaged, over what he regarded as Western decay and elitism. Writers such as Moravia and Calvino declared their agreement with Sereni's objectives. However, they adduced that it was impossible for writers to free themselves instantly from bourgeois literary tradition; and stressed that Russia and Italy were at different stages of social and cultural development.³³³ With this argument, they excused those artists whom Fadeev and Sereni criticised, and claimed a less abstract policy, more rooted in the objective cultural situation of a country

³³² Ilja Ehrenburg, Speech at the Congress of Intellectuals for Peace, Wroclaw, 25 August 1948, published in Il congresso di Wroclaw, PCI Centro diffusione stampa, date and place of publication unspecified, p. 41-2.

³³³ See Nello Ajello, op. cit.

such as Italy, which had not yet reached Socialism and whose intellectuals, therefore, were still unable to produce a clearly recognisable Socialist culture.

It was foreseeable that the criticism directed towards Sereni's cultural policy would focus on his aim to line up intellectuals with the Soviet bloc and mechanically translate Fadeev's view to Italy. The course taken by the PCI cultural policy during his period of office threatened to detach professional Italian intellectuals from the process of social renewal that the Communists intended to carry out. This was the main reason for his replacement in 1952. Since then, his period in office has been regarded as a short-lived anomaly resulting from the overly-strong influence of Stalinism on the PCI during the outbreak of the Cold War. When Salinari succeeded Sereni in the Cultural Commission chair, he strongly criticised the latter's attempts to liquidate 'the whole tradition of Italian bourgeois avant-garde thought, in opposition to the objective social and economic situation'.³³⁴ For Salinari, Proletarianism had to be abandoned, so that the bourgeois intelligentsia would not become detached from the process of social transformation.³³⁵

Salinari substituted Sereni's politics for a more careful relationship with the traditional intellectuals, but he did not dismantle the network of organisations created in the 1947-1951 period. Nevertheless, he stressed the need to produce qualified cultural products, and mass activities organised by local Party sections did not for him fall into this category. Instead, his policy

³³⁴ See Nicola D'Antonio, Introduction to 'Intervento di Carlo Salinari alla riunione del comitato centrale del PCI, 10 November 1951', in Carlo Salinari, due interventi di politica culturale, Amministrazione comunale di Montecaglioso and Rocco Fontana (ed.), Montecaglioso, 1988, p.11.

focused on recovering the support of traditional intellectuals and connecting with the growing sectors of tertiary workers that did not match Sereni's restrictive idea of the proletariat. The Cultural Commission continued carrying out massive educational projects, but more traditional ones replaced many of the collective activities of the preceding period. For example, the highly respected Einaudi publishing house was commissioned to undertake the publication of Gramsci's Notebooks; the Gramsci Institute, formerly a library, became an institution organised like a traditional university; and the Editori riuniti publishing house was created in 1953 to compete for a wider market than party militants.³³⁶

A commentator on Salinari's policy, Nicola d'Antonio, notes that, from 1947, the Party had focused on developing a mass Communist culture, but 'the tendency to massification of culture and direct intervention in theoretical debates was seen as intolerant...'³³⁷ Negative interpretations such as these became widely accepted because they linked Sereni's policy with the bad reputation of Stalinism. To some extent this is true but, as Gundle and others have recently argued, this interpretation has masked the novelty of some cultural initiatives during the Sereni years, oriented towards democratising the production and consumption of cultural products. For Gundle:

'[Sereni's] greater sensibility to the mass dimension of political activity made him the first real cultural organiser of the PCI... [He] sought to establish cultural politics on a much broader basis than before... What Sereni added

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ See Stephen Gundle, op. cit., (1992).

was a grasp of the need for systematic co-ordination at all levels including that of popular culture.' ³³⁸

Sereni's replacement shows how important the political weight of the traditional intellectuals was in the PCI. Such a move prevented more of them from quitting. Yet, it is also true that they were losing political relevance in the wider social context, displaced by the explosion of the new means of formation of public opinion that accompanied post-war mass society. For this reason, from a purely political point of view, what seemed to be a recuperation of the values of culture with a capital 'C' within the party, to use Vittorini's expression,³³⁹ brought about, in reality, a regression to a situation in which the Communist Party ceased to be an active force in Italian culture, in the sense that it ceased to have a specific perspective regarding the production and reception of the works of art. Instead, it limited itself to praise and use the intelligentsia as a means to acquire social prestige. The possibilities of a blossoming autonomous working class culture were cut short by means at least as authoritarian as those that the Stalinist wing had been using. Eventually, Sereni was relegated to a secondary role in the Senate and the Partisans for Peace, while an emerging generation of young cultural producers educated within the party were excluded from the new activities. For example, the amateur Mass Theatre director Luciano Leonesi remembers that:

³³⁷ Nicola D'Antonio, *op. cit.*, p.11.

³³⁸ Stephen Gundle, *op. cit.* (2000), p.53.

³³⁹ See footnote 194.

'I'm telling you the story in my way, but you must read the documents, if you can find them, because the language they used was very evasive, very sophisticated and very political. None of us understood whether we had been mistaken or whether we were right. None of us was sure about how to work... However, in practice, the Mass Theatre closed. Then, we tried to get involved in 'Teatro stabile'.... However, the directive was that [the 'Teatro stabile'] would be managed by the 'Zambonians.'³⁴⁰ Then, they began to enjoy: Molière! Let's bring a French director! We tried to push them to popular culture from within the Party, but they took a maximalist attitude and acted only Molière, Shakespeare, etc...'³⁴¹

If we have to understand the modification of the PCI cultural politics, after 1952, as a return to Togliatti's original tenets, some commentators have argued that this conveyed an over-simplification of the notion of hegemony. Gundle suggests that Togliatti's understanding of Gramsci remained attached to an anachronistic vision of culture that privileged the fine arts and 'high culture' in general over the new forms of mass communication. He underlines that Gramsci considered the social type of the fine artist and the traditional intellectual as an important element in the revolutionary break-through of Italian society. However, for Gramsci, as the organisation of the party improved, new organic intellectuals should be created. Conversely, Togliatti conceived cultural politics as a means to achieve respectability before the eyes of those who viewed his party as a force at the service of Moscow. Therefore, when cultural policy was in his hands, the PCI never stressed the

³⁴⁰ The nickname of the Communist lecturers of Bologna University, whose offices are in Zamboni street.

importance of producing organic intellectuals of the working class movement. Rather, it focused on the traditional bourgeois intellectual. As a consequence, the cultural policy of the PCI could not overcome the limitations of the Liberal notion of high culture that had been in place before Fascism. It simultaneously involved a fundamental lack of understanding of the new developments that accompanied post-war mass society, such as radio, cinema and television, which were entirely left in the hands of the Church, the Christian Democrat Government and the American entertainment industry.³⁴² Gundle underlines that the PCI cultural policy was intended to connect the intellectuals and the workers. However:

'The way in which this policy was conducted, by means of the development of a theory of the political engagement of the cultural producers in journals and debates, [meant that] the Communists were trapped in an old, pre-technical cultural model that belonged to the period prior to the 1920s. For to try and connect high and low by means of conventional forms of popularisation that bypassed new languages and media was ultimately a hopeless task in an age in which cinema and popular publishing were beginning to achieve just this integration of classes, tastes and interests on an advanced plane.'³⁴³

The consequence of this process was that:

³⁴¹ My interview with Luciano Leonesi, op. cit., (2000).

³⁴² See Stephen Gundle, in Stephen Gundle and Bernard Wailes, 'The Left, 1943-48,' in Liberation and Reconstruction: Politics, Culture and Society in France and Italy, 1943-1954, Milton Keynes, The Open University, 1989, pp. 27-28.

³⁴³ Stephen Gundle, op. cit. (2000), p. 41.

'The role of the traditional intellectual in legitimating social arrangements had not been superseded in Italy, but it had already begun to be undermined by the extended functions taken by the State in the inter-war years and the emergence of strategies of integration typical of mass society that would rapidly become the norm in successive years. The PCI's failure to take account of these developments weakened its action in crucial ways.'³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

VII THE DEBATE ON POPULAR CULTURE

1. Progressive Folklore Vs Fine Arts: The Case of Mass Theatre.

The impact of the cultural politics of the PCI generated a widespread debate about how professional artists could relate to a mass proletarian audience. In many cases, however, the argument did not overcome the boundaries of high culture and the intelligentsia as a specific social phenomenon. This chapter is conversely devoted to the cultural activity of the working class itself and how it became related to, and influenced, the world of high culture.

Mass Theatre was a short-lived initiative that functioned from 1949 under the leadership of Marcello Sartarelli. There were no professional actors or authors in the plays but only peasants, workers and former partisans illustrating their own experiences of anti-Fascism and class struggle. The First Congress of Mass Theatre, with the participation of companies from all over the country, was held in Forlì in 1951. Two years earlier, Sartarelli had organised the first play in the Bologna Municipal Theatre with the financial support of the PCI. In it, episodes of the liberation under the title Un popolo in lotta (A People in Struggle) were represented before a party crowd that filled the theatre completely.³⁴⁵ Then, Sartarelli returned to Rome and his amateur assistant, Leonesi, remained in charge of the project. The next production of Un popolo in lotta was performed the same year in Bologna's Margherita

³⁴⁵ See Stephen Gundle, op. cit. (2000); and Luciano Leonesi, Il romazo del teatro di massa, Cappelli editore, Bologna, 1989.

Gardens and, then, in the Modena Stadium, on the occasion of L'Unità festival.

The complexity and size of Mass Theatre performances increased over the next years. In 1950, the Bologna Mass Theatre Company presented Sulla via della libertà (On The Road Towards Freedom), a set of episodes of the Emilia-Romagna Resistance and the workers' struggle with 600 actors that included the Battle of Porta Lama, with hundreds acting Germans and partisans, and the Death of Maria Margotti. The most ambitious 'teatro di massa' project was held in Modena in September 1950. 5,000 actors, including students, workers, artisans and peasants performed Domani e gioventù (Tomorrow and Youth) in front of an audience of 20,000 spectators. The play related, through positive and heroic characters, the life and struggle of the Modena working class through dance, chorus, classical music and a narrator.³⁴⁶

Despite the support of the PCI, most of the work had been done on a voluntary basis and this made it difficult to give Mass Theatre any continuity. Neither was there any chance of gaining access to State funding.³⁴⁷ However, a more significant reason for its failure than a lack of resources was that, despite the enthusiasm of the local PCI cells, the Togliattian cultural officials regarded the experience as banal and monotonous. Leonesi says that the PCI chairman himself had attended a play in Bologna and had not

³⁴⁶ See Stephen Gundle, op. cit. (2000).

³⁴⁷ A Law for Funding the theatre had been issued on 20 February 1948. The law put these resources in the hands of the Prime Minister, De Gasperi. See 'Privilegi dei ricchi o diritto del popolo il teatro', Il calendario del popolo, n. 46, July 1948, p. 255.

liked it, to the distress of the devoted militants who had spent months preparing the event.³⁴⁸

What worried the party leaders most was the lack of support of the professional local intellectual class. In Rome, Sereni regarded Mass Theatre as one of the major achievements of the party's cultural policy,³⁴⁹ but Trombadori had been undermining this kind of initiative, arguing that exaggerated politicisation and proletarianism prevented any real political articulation of party militants and intellectuals. From this point of view, proletarianism was seen to bear responsibility for the fact that 'the working class lacks any possibility of connecting with other strata of the population...'³⁵⁰ Trombadori went on to ask 'Why does such a division exist? The idea of cultural work as mass work should prevent this from happening.'³⁵¹

Eventually, the head of the Central Committee Press and Propaganda Commission, Giancarlo Pajetta, turned up to the Forlì Congress to warn the Mass Theatre companies about the dangers of taking a direction isolated from the rest of Italian culture.³⁵² Nobody had criticised Mass Theatre openly but, after Pajetta's intervention, funding dried up and the Communist councils began to set up 'Teatro stabile', municipal theatre companies with professional actors who were civil servants. Where Togliatti and his followers

³⁴⁸ My interview with Luciano Leonesi, op. cit., (2000).

³⁴⁹ See the records of the Meetings of the Central Committee Cultural Commission on 19 October 1949 and 25 January 1950; and the Ufficio nazionale per il lavoro culturale, Rome, 14, 15 and 16 June 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome.

³⁵⁰ See Antonello Trombadori's intervention, Records of the meeting of the Ufficio nazionale per il lavoro culturale, Rome, 14, 15 and 16 June 1949, Documents of the Central Committee Cultural Commission, Gramsci Institute Archive, Rome, p.6.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

had fought from one point of view, in episodes such as the polemics with Vittorini, they now fought from the other, intending to prevent professional intellectuals with a party card from becoming excluded from the activity of the PCI.³⁵³ Leonesi argues that the PCI preoccupation to avoid breaches between its worker and intellectual constituencies was justified, but this policy was carried out in a too authoritarian way: 'I am convinced that the Communist party did well to draw a distinction [between Mass Theatre and "high" culture], but it did badly when it completely eliminated the great movement born out of Mass Theatre.'³⁵⁴

Leonesi, who was eventually excluded from other PCI cultural initiatives, argues that Pajetta's analysis was correct, but, on the negative side, the PCI hierarchy prevented the experience from developing its full potential. It was true that Mass Theatre could not be the paradigm for Italian Communist culture, but it was also true that: 'Mass Theatre... had animated the whole of Italian theatre due to its originality and its great ability to attract a popular audience that everybody wanted.'³⁵⁵ Precisely because of this, the PCI could have used it to popularise 'high' works of art instead of liquidating it. Leonesi recalls Pajetta's speech at Forlì, where he argued that:

³⁵² My interview with Luciano Leonesi, op. cit. (2000)

³⁵³ This was a major problem for Communist cultural activity in the Tuscan and Emilia-Romagna strongholds. These zones had the largest number of Mass Theatre companies; and contained a full one-third of the PCI members. However, the number of professional intellectuals, including teachers, technicians, professionals and students was very low: 970 in Bologna, in 1948, and 204 in Modena during 1950. See Stephen Gundle, op. cit. (2000).

³⁵⁴ My interview with Luciano Leonesi, op. cit. (2000).

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

"Everything that is culturally valuable is mass culture. Therefore, you must take into account Shakespeare, Chekhov, Pirandello... They all produced mass culture." We say, however, that, nowadays, the Italian worker doesn't give a shit for Chekhov. He doesn't understand Shakespeare. Who cares about Molière? By means of Mass Theatre, we give him the knowledge, the ability, etc. Then, after a short time, he will come to like Chekhov.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ See Ibid.

2. Ernesto De Martino and the Critique of Popular Culture

The cultural politics of the PCI during the post-war period highlighted the contradictions in practice between the objectives of reaching a mass public, spreading a political message, and achieving aesthetic quality. The anthropologist and historian Ernesto De Martino discussed this issue and developed a theory of progressive folklore, or culturally and politically advanced mass popular culture, based upon a method taken from both Gramsci and Marxist-Leninist Soviet anthropology.

De Martino was convinced of the political character of the social sciences, including those paradigms that adopted the thesis of independence in method and a commitment to pure truth. His reflection on his own status as an intellectual moved him to take political sides: 'The effort to remain, as a scientist, in the purity of theory, in the historiographical contemplation of human events, drove me to acknowledge the impure theoretical character of traditional ethnology and rendered clear and strengthened the link that, I as a practical man, have forged with the working class and its objective of liberation.'³⁵⁷

De Martino related the elemental cultural expression of the primitives with that of the working class; and with those from areas of Europe alien to bourgeois culture and economic organisation, such as the peasantry. They formed the Subaltern class, 'a humanness already constituted, but not yet present, which

³⁵⁷ Ernesto De Martino, 'Ancora sulla "Storia del mondo popolare e subalterno"', *'Società'*, year VI, n° 2, June 1950 (a), pp. 306-309 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 91.

had traversed history, but did not possess, make or overcome it.'³⁵⁸ His committed attitude, as an intellectual, towards the Subalterns was rooted in the belief that there existed 'a universal human foundation where the "same" and the "different" are overcome as two historic possibilities of being a man, a starting point from where we could take the road that leads to the other humanity.'³⁵⁹

He argued that bourgeois ethnology was unable to perceive the historical character and the human meaning of the cultural expressions of the colonial peoples, the proletariat or the peasantry. Malinowsky and Levi-Bruhl, for example, conceived cultures as self-contained wholes; and this prevented moral and political judgements on their social practices.³⁶⁰ Conversely, De Martino believed in the common identity of the human spirit, and argued that these examples of 'bourgeois' anthropology ratified a failure to comprehend that world or, at best, 'when faced by a need to consider the archaic resorted to that historical pious feeling that leads to the impossibility of questioning it.'³⁶¹ 'Bourgeois' anthropology's acknowledgement of the particular characteristics of the non-European peoples implied the acknowledgement of their right to their own identity.³⁶² However, if these characteristics were conceived as crystallised in essential descriptions, the problems regarding the need to rescue them from their subaltern condition could not be solved, and the total respect for other cultures could end up neutralising any sympathetic

³⁵⁸ Giorgio Salinas, 'Idealismo, marxismo, strutturalismo,' in AA.VV. 'L'antropologia italiana, un secolo di storia', Laterza, Rome-Bari 1985, p. 217, in Ugo Fabietti, Storia dell'antropologia, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1991, p. 146.

³⁵⁹ Ernesto De Martino, 'La fine del mondo' Einaudi, Turin 1977, p. 413, in *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁶⁰ See Ernesto De Martino, 'Intorno a una storia del mondo popolare e subalterno', 'Società', year V, n° 3, September 1949, pp. 411-435 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed), *op. cit.*

attitude in the face of blatant material and intellectual underdevelopment, or it could even justify apartheid.

By contrast, for De Martino, 1950s Soviet anthropology was explicitly linked to politics and therein lay its superiority. This conviction did not mean denying the distinction between the theoretical task of comprehension and the practical task of transformation, but De Martino asserted their interdependence without transgressing the rules of scientific discourse.³⁶³ In the USSR, the social structures and the cultures of the different peoples were conceived as a complex combination of elements in dialectical opposition that were able to be apprehended by rational knowledge. Soviet anthropology therefore rejected any claim of relativity between 'historical' Western peoples and 'non-historical' tribal peoples. Instead, it postulated that there is only one way of human being and reasoning, and regarded all cultures as being set on a common path towards Socialism³⁶⁴

The main strength of the Soviet paradigm was that scientists had assumed the task of collaborating with the State and the party in their work of constructing Socialism in remote republics of the country. Obviously, this could be considered ethnocentrism, a renewed version of Russian colonialism. However, De Martino thought that:

³⁶¹ See Ernesto De Martino, op. cit. (1949), pp. 411-435.

³⁶² Ernesto De Martino, Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

'The duty of the party regarding the working masses and the Soviet peoples who live in a patriarchal manner [consists in] helping them to liquidate their persistent patriarchal-feudal relationships. At the same time, it takes into account, for its work, all the characteristics of the real economic environment; the class structure and the culture and the customs of every nation without making mechanical transplantations... Therefore, Soviet anthropology means both historiographical elucidation and objective analysis... of a reality moving and transforming itself.'³⁶⁵

De Martino goes on to explain that in the Soviet Union, folklore was understood as an active cultural expression of the subaltern world. It was not the object of a retrospective interest, or conceived as non-culture, but was regarded as an operating element.³⁶⁶ In this theoretical framework, the main problem consisted in drawing a distinction between the cultural production that matched the process of renewal and those expressions that subsisted artificially, only because they masked economic relations of exploitation. The distinction between progressive and reactionary cultural elements was applied to all the historical manifestations of folklore, be they images, music or words. There existed progressive pre-Revolutionary popular expressions that commented on the peasants' revolts and the rights of the serfs, or ridiculed the landowners and the priests, or lamented slave labour or exile. In sum, there existed a history of rebellion that was as old as mankind, and it was the task of the anthropologist to bring it to light.³⁶⁷ The October events had

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Il calendario del popolo, for instance, referred to the distinction between cultivated and 'popular and realist' poetry between the end of the 13th Century and the beginning of the 14th,

provided new subjects, referred to by De Martino. These supposed a qualitative evolution, in so far as they expressed the people's acquisition of a higher level of political consciousness. These were, to name but a few:

'The grand Imperialist war and the Socialist Revolution; the uprisings against the Tsar, the landowners and the capitalists; the collapse of the Russian Empire, that looked like an invincible colossus; the immortal Lenin; the dictatorship of the working class and the peasantry; new men, never seen before, the Bolsheviks who, in many ways, resembled the heroes sung of by the people in many legends and songs; the liberation of woman, the heroes of labour... education; books; science... The new man who sings to himself, his life and the extraordinary future which appears before the eyes of millions of ordinary men for the first time.'³⁶⁸

In the 1950s, compilations of songs and other cultural manifestations of the factories, the fields and the front, both in Italy and in the USSR succeeded each other, and anthologies of the 19th and 20th centuries revolutionary repertoire were published.³⁶⁹ Yet, despite the appeal of these experiences, De Martino warned of the limits of application in Italy of the conclusions of Soviet anthropology for two reasons: in the first place, the popular world had not yet overcome its subaltern status outside the Soviet Union: it had not yet reached political power and, therefore, was unable to produce a clearly

and opposed Dante, Genuccio del Bene and Cino da Pistoia's 'Dolce stil nuovo' to the anonymous Folclore da san Geminiano, Cene da la chitarra, and Cecco Angiolieri, who wrote that 'There is one who sings for love and hate; and there is one who sings to get away from melancholy.' (Quoted in Il calendario del popolo, n. 34, July 1947, p.237).

³⁶⁸ Ernesto De Martino, op. cit. (1949), p. 66.

progressive folklore.³⁷⁰ In the second place, the problems that the Soviets put forward should be related to the hegemonic Italian culture: Historicist Idealism. It was agreed, however, that Soviet anthropology had made a fundamental contribution: to point out the irruption into history of those human groups that bourgeois society had maintained in a subaltern condition hitherto.³⁷¹ For De Martino, this was the most relevant social event of the age and, consequently, it was the source from which art and anthropology should take their method and their subject matter:

'The Soviet cultural consciousness tends to constantly consolidate the link... between the holders of folklore and the "writers". Taking its inspiration from the motifs loved by Gorky, the Soviet cultural consciousness tends to conceive cultured literature as a continuation of popular creativity and popular creativity as a source of inspiration for cultured literature.'³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Ernesto De Martino, 'Etnologia e folclore nell'Unione Sovietica', 'Scienza e cultura nell'URSS', Rome, Italia-URSS, 1950 (b), pp. 53-69, in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), op. cit., pp. 129-142.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 140.

3. Progressive Folklore and Italian Culture.

De Martino pointed out the relationship that was then being established between Marxism, the proletariat and the non-proletarianised peasantry. To different extents and ways, these groups had become conscious of being alienated by Capitalism and were aiming at an alliance.³⁷³

Within such an alliance, however, it was necessary to distinguish between magic primitive popular culture and progressive culture, in so far as the former was related to pre-capitalist social relations and the latter was contemporary to bourgeois society. This meant that traditional folklore was a residue of the past condemned to disappear in the flow of history, while Progressive folklore was the other side of the coin of Modern culture. The fact that it was not in the museums was nothing but the proof of Capitalism's social imbalances and revealed its oppositional character. Furthermore, the fact that some intellectuals had become interested in Progressive folklore meant that it was contemporary and coincided with a time when the workers had succeeded in intervening in society with their own organisation and aimed to become the leading force. It held not an external, but an internal relationship with the bourgeois world and represented a progressive force in culture.

Did the oppositional character of folklore immediately mean that it was progressive? For De Martino, it was so only in so far as it expressed 'the people's conscious alternative against its own subaltern situation, or

³⁷³ See Ernesto De Martino, 'Il folklore progressivo', *L'Unità*, 26 June 1951 (b), p. 3

everything that comments on and expresses in cultural terms its fight for emancipation.'³⁷⁴ It conveyed new conscious autonomous expressive forms: forms that both expressed protest against the masses' subordinate situation and also consciously intended to break with the tradition of bourgeois culture.³⁷⁵

Could, however, a progressive folklore that was a real alternative to bourgeois culture be possible? The peasants make popular art in the sense that they make crafts. However, they cease to practise craftsmanship when they cease to be peasants and become proletarians. From an avant-garde understanding of the question, one could argue that craftsmanship is only technical repetition and, therefore, conservative, whereas the proletariat is the people, and there does not exist any historical gap between it and the bourgeois. But, in industrial society, popular art is not made by the people themselves because they are not a self-conscious 'people', but only a mass integrated into an economic and productive system that clearly separates the phase of creative thinking from the phase of production. As Argan writes, 'when the worker and the machine are set in motion, the intellectual work is already finished.'³⁷⁶ Therefore, the working class as such cannot produce

³⁷⁴Ernesto De Martino, op. cit. (1951) (b), p. 114.

³⁷⁵The term 'progressive folklore' was developed further by authors linked to the Left-wing parties. Luigi Lombardi Satriani conceived folklore as counter-culture, and distinguished several levels in it according to the nature of its political criticism. Giovanni Bossio carried out a programme of recuperation of the cultural forms linked to the development of the working class; and pursued a research model that did not distinguish between political and scientific activity. The PCI magazine Il Calendario del popolo organised competitions of new and old popular progressive songs. These were recorded by De Martino and can be found at the Ernesto De Martino Archive at Sesto Fiorentino, in Florence's Province.

³⁷⁶Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Arte moderna come arte popolare' in Francesca Frantini (ed.), introduction to Arte popolare moderna, Gli incontri di Verrucchio, Cappelli editore, Rocca san Casciano, 1968, p. 26.

culture on its own, but a culture for the working class has to be produced by an elite.

How is it possible to rescue the workers from their state of alienation, of passive indifference, and make them self-conscious? In the 1930s, Zhdanov called the Socialist Realist artists 'engineers of human souls.'³⁷⁷ Likewise, other 'authoritarian' formulations of people's art, such as Sironi's 'Manifesto della pittura murale' conceived popular culture as something that the traditional intellectual produced for the proletariat, and not the outcome of the workers' activity itself.³⁷⁸ Finally, on different lines, 'Forma 1', a post-war group of Marxist artists, declared in their manifesto that 'the human is determined by the form created by man as artist'.³⁷⁹ In all cases, it was agreed that proletarian art could not be made by the proletariat, but was the outcome of a top-to-bottom operation of either shaping its amorphous consciousness or inciting it to intellectual activity by different means. The risks were that one could adopt traditional forms of easy readings, often inauthentic and reactionary; or make elitist art despite the very best intentions.

³⁷⁷ Zhdanov, Andrei, op. cit. 1992.

³⁷⁸ The manifesto was largely influenced by the early 'Novecento' and declared that: 'Our civilisation will become identified with the Fascist style, which will emerge from Mural painting. The educational function of painting is, above all, a question of style. More than through the subject-matter (the Communist approach), art will succeed in making a new mark in the popular consciousness through style.' The romantic political avant-gardism that characterised the first years of Fascism would return, however, after the war, with the Muralists and their pedagogic attitude towards the masses. See Mario Campigli, Carrà, Achille Funi and Sironi, 'Manifesto della pittura murale, 'La colonna', December 1933, reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), Art in theory, 1900-1990. an anthology of changing ideas, Oxford. Blackwell. 1992, pp 401-409.

³⁷⁹ 'Forma 1 Manifesto,' Rome, 15 March 1947, reprinted in Italian in Paola Barocchi (ed.), op. cit., pp. 65-66. The English translation is taken from Germano Celant (ed.), op. cit., p. 712.

Gramsci wrote that 'every man is a philosopher, although not every man is a professional philosopher.'³⁸⁰ By this, he meant that every man has a worldview that stands and evolves in relationship with his social position; and it shows itself in language, folklore, common sense and religion. In Gramsci, the capacity for a worldview to become hegemonic, however, is proportional to its level of coherence, and he argues that 'the people, by definition, cannot count on elaborated, systematic and politically organised conceptions.'³⁸¹ Therefore, 'innovation cannot achieve a mass character, in the early stages, if it does not occur as the result of the activity of an elite within which the conception that is implicit in human activity has become, to some extent, an active and coherent consciousness, and a determined and precise will.'³⁸²

In De Martino's interpretation, Gramsci seems to conceive the proletariat, not as a fixed concept, but as a historical entity that also develops according to its own dynamics. When Gramsci's work was reviewed by post-war authors of pro-Soviet allegiance, such as Pietro Angelini, it was concluded that the main point of disagreement between Gramsci and the Crocean version of Modernism consisted in the point that 'Gramsci, unlike Croce, thought that the phenomenon [of mass culture] did not consist in a complex of prejudices to eradicate',³⁸³ but he rather thought that mass culture 'has within itself a principle of self-overcoming.'³⁸⁴ 1940s and 1950s examples such as Mass Theatre were qualitatively different from inter-war Fascist mass culture and

³⁸⁰ Antonio Gramsci, op. cit., 1992, p. 6.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid., p. 33.

³⁸³ Pietro Angelini, 'Gramsci, De Martino e la crisi della scienza del folklore' in Giorgio Baratta and Andrea Cattone (eds.), Antonio Gramsci e il Progresso Intellettuale di Massa, Milan, Unicopoli, 1995, pp. 53-78.

showed, as De Martino put it, 'the people's conscious protest against its subordinate condition and commented on and expressed in cultural terms their fight for emancipation.'³⁸⁵ The possibility of a real people's culture goes hand in hand with a broader historic process, the 20th Century mass movements. Only with the spreading of Communism among the masses could the historic dichotomy between high and low that Gramsci had analysed be fully resolved. As De Martino put it:

'With the expansion of the working class movement and its highest theoretical consciousness, Marxism-Leninism, a true liberation from the traditional forms of ideological subordination is taking place in the cultural life of the subaltern classes and, thus, the birth of a truly progressive folklore.'³⁸⁶

De Martino underlined that, from then on, traditional intellectuals would not make the main contributions to Italian culture any more, but the subaltern classes would spontaneously produce them. These had taken the initiative and begun to distance themselves from traditional folklore to approach the cultural level of the most advanced Modernism. It was bourgeois and regressive to think like Croce: that is, to value popular culture according to the categories of high culture and prejudiciously reject the possibilities of progressive folklore becoming a real cultural alternative.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ De Martino Archive, R-14, b3 in Ibid., p. 68.

³⁸⁶ Ernesto De Martino, De Martino Archive, R-14, b3 in Pietro Angelini, op. cit., p. 68.

³⁸⁷ See 'Il folklore, un invito ai lettori del calendario del popolo', Il calendario del popolo, n. 86, November 1951, p. 989.

The discourse on the historic gap between the USSR and Italy as an argument against the possibility of a progressive folklore in Italy was partly answered by considering the Resistance experience as a revolution in its own right. This question was also analysed by Franco Catalano in an article titled Il mito e la realtà (Myth and Reality), published in the Socialist newspaper Avanti! in 1950. Catalano acknowledged the dangers of falling into mythical understandings of popular culture. However, instead of making comparisons with the Soviet Union, he placed the question within the boundaries of Western Europe, and regarded the 1940s as the opening of a new historic period characterised by the self-conscious intervention of the masses in public life. This not only rendered possible the existence of a revolutionary wing in bourgeois culture, but also of organic intellectuals of the working class:

'During most of the last century, it was difficult to create an organic class of intellectuals linked to the proletariat, because the peasants or the workers revolted, but they had no class consciousness yet, and they chose improvised and unsuitable leaders, and not their own intellectuals...

However, now, the working class puts itself forward as the hegemonic, not as a subaltern class: it consciously aims to rule society. Therefore, now it is possible to create an organic group of intellectuals of the working class.'³⁸⁸

Similarly, De Martino declared in 1952 that:

³⁸⁸ Franco Catalano, 'Il mito e la realtà', Avanti!, 28 April 1950, in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), op. cit., p. 121.

'After the "Risorgimento's" failure to produce an Italian cultural nation, we are today faced with a second, decisive great attempt that has been initiated by the Resistance. This second attempt... has two different aspects: on the one hand, we witness the liberation of folklore from its traditional positions, and the blossoming of a progressive folklore that is linked to the experiences of the Resistance, the occupations of land, the occupation of factories, etc. On the other hand, a sector of democratic intellectuals, realising that the expressive destiny of traditional culture is exhausted, are seeking to establish solid links with popular Humanism and intend to open a fruitful dialogue with the ordinary man. Therefore, ... the process of unification with the hegemonic culture that Gramsci indicated as his objective is being accomplished.'³⁸⁹

The Italian versions of progressive folklore took their subject-matter from the Partisan movement, the strikes, the occupation of the factories and the fields, the constitution of the PCI as a mass party and, in sum, all these circumstances linked to anti-Fascism and class struggle. It consisted in events such as the First of May parades, the new politicised versions of traditional songs, 'L'Unità' festival, etc.³⁹⁰ Examples include the songs sung while rice-harvesting in the Po river, such as 'Provate voi a lavorá e poi vedete la differenza tra lavorá e comandà.' ('You try and work, and, then, realise the difference between working and commanding'); or the poems by amateur authors, such as the rice-harvester Rosetta Franchi:

³⁸⁹Ernesto De Martino, 'Nuie simme a mamma d' 'a bellezza', Il calendario del popolo, 8, 1952 (b), p. 1061 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed), op. cit., p. 149-150.

³⁹⁰ See 'Il Folklore, un invito ai lettori del calendario', Il calendario del popolo, n. 86, November 1951, p. 989.

'With my legs sunk in the mud
and my hands bloated by water
I am tired, I feel like dying
I have no rest
neither in the day nor in the night.'³⁹¹

For its part, L'Unità Festival was the Italian version of L'Humanité Festival in France. The first one was organised in 1945 by Giancarlo Pajetta and Willy Schiappannelli, in Mariano Comense. In 1946, it extended to Modena and Tradate Comasco. In 1947, to Rome, Genoa, Turin and Florence. In 1948, there were 900 festivals all over Italy. For example, the 1946 Modena festival included 24 events, such as a theatre play, comedies, dance, cycling, boxing, skating, a classical music concert, a demonstration, political speeches, a fashion show, the competition 'Modena's Little Star' for children singers; and a beauty competition for babies.³⁹²

Il calendario del popolo was a particularly active agent in registering and publicising these cultural expressions. In 1950, Sereni, Trevisani, Russo and Quasimodo organised the 'Calendario del popolo' first yearly competition for dialect poetry. They asked the entrants to produce new poems, not to recuperate old ones, and offered a 150,000 lire first prize. The poetry prize was accompanied by a prize for articles on popular culture in partnership with

³⁹¹ Quoted in Adriano Guerra, 'Il gruppo di Voghera alla 15 Borgonuovo' in Mario De Micheli et al., Artisti realisti nelle campagne pavesi degli anni 50, Vangelista, Milan, 1984, p. 54.

³⁹² See Edoardo Novelli, C'era una volta il Pci. Autobiografia di un partito attraverso le immagini della sua propaganda, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 2000.

the People's Book Campaign.³⁹³ They received 611 entries by 211 people ranging from young professional writers to amateurs.³⁹⁴ The winner was the Sardinian schoolteacher Giovanni Moi with Su pizzinu mutilado (To a Mutilated Little Boy) and the second prize was awarded to Pier Paolo Pasolini's El testament coran,³⁹⁵ where a dead Partisan tells his story in the first person, written in Friulian.³⁹⁶

The poetry competition was still directed to those falling within a wide category of 'poets'. The following year, De Martino began a programme of recovering original progressive popular songs and poems in Il calendario del popolo and, to this end, mobilised the Calendarist Circles.³⁹⁷ He was looking for anonymous examples of the 'current process of deep transformation [of folklore]... as the result of the impulse of the working class and its natural ally, the peasantry.'³⁹⁸

The political relevance of these activities was twofold. Firstly, the PCI had to acknowledge it as a genuine expression of revolutionary aims:

'The unification of cultural life in the way Gramsci conceived it, that is, the creation of a new intellectual life of the country that heals the gap between

³⁹³ See, *Ibid.* n. 70, July 1950.

³⁹⁴ There were poems in Veneto, Ligure, Piedmontese, Sardinian, Lombard, Friulian, Palermitan, Neapolitan, Umbrian, Romanesco, Romagnolo and Calabrian. See 'Primo concorso nazionale per la poesia dialettale', Il calendario del popolo, n. 73, October 1950; and Alberto Cirese, 'Lo studio del folklore in Italia', *Ibid.*, n. 82, July 1951(b), p. 941.

³⁹⁵ Meaning in Friulian unknown.

³⁹⁶ See 'Primo concorso nazionale per la poesia dialettale', Il calendario del popolo, n. 73, October 1950, p. 690.

³⁹⁷ See Ernesto De Martino, 'Il Folklore, un invito ai lettori del calendario', *Ibid.*, n. 85, October 1951, p. 989.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

high culture and the people, cannot be limited to the new literature, to the new Neorealist cinema, to the new sensibility that blossoms in some of our painters, etc. If we want it to be a complete unification, it should also include the integration into cultural circles of that progressive cultural production which, breaking with the traditional folkloristic forms, is linked to the process of social and political emancipation of the people themselves.³⁹⁹

Secondly, popular culture could become the terrain for the pedagogical activity of the traditional intellectuals among the masses. To consider it as anti-culture would have meant blocking the only way by which the subaltern classes could enter the cultured world: 'In these places where the party's ideological education has to be maintained within very humble margins, progressive folklore constitutes a useful cultural advance of the popular masses.'⁴⁰⁰ However, the main question was not pedagogical: 'the main problem is not "to enlighten the plebs" but to bring to light the new expressive civilisation that already lives in the popular world.'⁴⁰¹ This task was not a new one for Italian culture and Italian intellectuals. It meant bringing to a conclusion the 'Risorgimento' in the cultural field.

It is significant that the discussion was carried out outside Rinascita, in the Società journal, Il calendario del popolo, Avanti!, Lo spettatore italiano, Belfagor and L'Unità. The arguments were nonetheless fully related to the opposition between Serenians and Togliattians within the PCI, and they were

³⁹⁹Ernesto De Martino, op. cit. (1951) (b), p. 145.

⁴⁰⁰Ibid., p. 145-146.

⁴⁰¹Ernesto De Martino, op. cit. (1952) (b), p. 1061.

supposed to take Gramsci's theories as their starting point. Cirese put the question in this way:

'There exist, at least, two aspects in the popular cultural world: On one side, it is still linked to ancient forms of subjection to nature. On the other side, it takes an attitude of rebellion and self-affirmation. Therefore, the proletariat is able to move by itself from the traditional forms to reach autonomously very new forms of culture.'⁴⁰²

Accordingly, the intellectuals were asked to join and develop the culture of the subaltern classes by overcoming paternalism. That is, by regarding contemporary folklore as the cultural expression of a class 'fighting for the right of not merely being the theme of study, or the object of either bourgeois curiosity or contempt, but of becoming the subject of its own history.'⁴⁰³

Popular culture was for Cirese, 'partly reactionary culture needing to progress, and partly new and progressive, and, thus, needing to be vindicated.'⁴⁰⁴ The knowledge of folklore was not only of interest on its own, as, to sum up, the contradiction between formal conventionalism and progressive social content in folklore mirrored, in a way, the contradiction between formal innovation and detachment from the public in Italian high culture.⁴⁰⁵ Cirese argued: '... An open-minded study of the problems of the proletariat can help us to demolish

⁴⁰² Alberto M. Cirese, 'Il volgo protagonista', 'Avanti!', 8 May 1951(a) in Carla Pasquinelli, op. cit., pp. 161-165.

⁴⁰³ Alberto Cirese, op. cit. (1951) (b), p. 941.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Cirese quotes Croce, who had written that 'folklore express basic feelings in basic forms' (ibid.)

many bourgeois ideological positions both in the field of literature and art, that is, in the field of aesthetics, and in the more specifically historical field of the relationship between the traditional ruling classes and the proletariat.⁴⁰⁶

Thus, the issue of how to attract traditional artists to the PCI fell into the background, and a discussion arose about the following questions: Was the artist who creates out of nothing an essential or metaphysical entity or a historic product dependant on the complex of economic and social relationships, whose nature changes as these relationships develop? Was the Resistance the prelude to the birth of a new collective artist? If so, what is the role of the traditional artist who has achieved consciousness of this historic process?

De Martino invoked Gramsci to underline that 'to re-unify Italian cultural life means, for Gramsci, not only the forging of a group of intellectuals linked to the needs, the aims and the feelings of the popular masses, but also the dissolution of folklore as the non-organic, fragmented, anachronistic and serf-like cultural life of the subaltern classes.'⁴⁰⁷ He warned that mere contact with the world of high culture by the masses might not result, in the beginning, in a qualitative transformation of popular culture. Rather, it could mean a lowering of the level of official culture. According to De Martino, when the masses enter into history, they 'carry with them their cultural habits, their way of opposing themselves to the world, their ingenuous millenarian faith and their

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ernesto De Martino, 'Gramsci e il folklore', *'Il calendario del popolo'*, 8, 1952 (a), p. 1109 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed), op. cit., p. 155.

mythologism.'⁴⁰⁸ However, according to Bianchi Bardinelli, such reading of the phenomenon could be the consequence of bourgeois prejudices:

'I would not agree with De Martino in saying that the transition of the popular masses from object to subject of history unavoidably brings along, as a consequence, a "lowering" of the cultural level: this is a traditional bourgeois way of judging the new culture of the new society.'⁴⁰⁹

Gramsci had regarded folklore only as marking the limit of penetration of modern bourgeois thought and, because of this, his writings were liable to different interpretations. Cirese, for example, underlined the ambiguity of Gramsci's thought but asserted that, in the last instance, he intended to criticise and overcome folklore:

'Gramsci asserted that, in any case, folklore could be tenacious, effective and progressive. This neither implies nor denies... the underlying character of its means of expression, its lack of originality, its fragmentary character, its passivity in the face of contradictions, its simplicity and basic character as an intellectual category and, in sum, the subaltern position of the social class to which folklore belongs... Gramsci opposes folklore and Marxism, and not

⁴⁰⁸ Ernesto De Martino, op. cit., 1949, p. 56.

⁴⁰⁹ In 'Società', year VI, n° 1, March 1950, p. 10, quoted in Luporini, Cesare, 'Intorno alla storia del mondo popolare e subalterno', 'Società', year VI, n° 1, March 1950 (b), pp. 95-106 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), op. cit., pp. 79.

folklore and bourgeois culture... Folklore means everything that modern thought must erase.'⁴¹⁰

Also Giuseppe Giarrizzo asserted in Lo spettatore italiano journal that folklore could not become a part of national culture as such, but only in so far its elements, as Croce wrote, 'were artistic things, and not mere elements of popular psychology.'⁴¹¹ In other words, the peasant or the proletarian who produces art did not do so as a peasant or a proletarian, but as an artist.

For Giarrizzo, Gramsci moved from the romantic concept of 'the people' to 'the whole of the subaltern and instrumental classes' whose conception of life and the world is expressed in folklore and becomes objectively opposed to official culture. In De Martino's interpretation, this meant that Gramsci went beyond the mere verification of such opposition because he understood that, if folklore testified to the limit of penetration of the hegemonic culture, then it was immediately linked to the emancipatory process. Therefore, it not only acquired a character of mere negativity, but rather an active political role. If this was an adequate reading of the question, Giarrizzo asserted, then Gramsci presupposed a dialectic duality within society in a determinist manner, 'an implicit, mechanic, objective aim against the cultured world.'⁴¹² Vittorio Lanternari holds a similar opinion, but he attempts to rescue Gramsci's theories from De Martino's reading by adducing that Gramsci's

⁴¹⁰ Alberto M. Cirese, 'Concezioni del mondo, filosofia spontanea e istinto di classe nelle osservazioni sul folclore de A. Gramsci' (1950) in Eugenio Garin et al., Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea, Vol. II, Rome, Editori riuniti, 1976, p. 85

⁴¹¹ Benedetto Croce, quoted in Giuseppe Giarrizzo, 'Moralità scientifica e folclore', 'Lo spettatore italiano', n° 4, April 1954, pp. 180-184 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed), op. cit., pp. 16-175.

cultural politics consisted in establishing a relationship between high culture and folklore with the sole aim of overcoming the latter. To Lanternari, political systems act over the masses as elements of subordination to an exterior hegemony that limits their original thought. They do not contribute to a transformation of what these masses think in an embryonic and chaotic way, but rather they eradicate the masses' thought and substitute it by Modern thinking:

'When dealing with the "relationship between high philosophy and common sense" he [Gramsci] says that such a relationship is ensured by politics, the same as the relationship between intellectuals' and simple people's Catholicism. [Within a high/low cultural dynamics, typical of Capitalist society] Politics, as a self-conscious and organised action, ensures the top-to-bottom movement of ideas and clearly opposes the mechanism and objectivity that characterises popular culture.'⁴¹³

Both readings of the political relevance of folklore found allies within the PCI intelligentsia. Luporini considered it as a vestige from the past, always reactionary, and proposed, instead, an alliance with Crocean Idealism against what he regarded as a process of 'barbarisation'⁴¹⁴ of Italian culture. To this end, he quoted Gramsci, who wrote that 'the philosophy of praxis [i.e.

⁴¹² Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *Ibid.*, p.172.

⁴¹³ Vittorio Lanternari, 'Religione popolare e storicismo', *Belfagor*, n° 6, year XI, 1954, pp. 1-7.

⁴¹⁴ Cesare Luporini, *op. cit.* (1950) (b), p. 84.

Marxism] had to ally with alien tendencies to combat the residues of the pre-capitalist world in the popular masses, especially in the religious field.'⁴¹⁵

Luporini thought that, instead of establishing controversial distinctions between the progressive and the reactionary elements of folklore, intellectuals should focus on producing an alternative to free the proletariat from cultural subordination to the ruling class and help it to evolve until it was in a situation to produce its own culture. He believed the alliance with bourgeois culture with pedagogical aims to be a positive and permanent strategy that should continue during the Socialist phase until the Communist stage was reached, as 'the capacity [of the working class] to carry on fighting and lead the whole democratic front is essentially linked to the possession of an avant-garde doctrine.'⁴¹⁶

Also Franco Fortini highlighted the distinction between the tactical necessities derived from the cultural backwardness of the peasant and working mass and the a-critical attitude regarding their cultural expressions. In an article titled Contro il mito del popolo ('Against the myth of the people'), published in Avanti! In 1950, he warned about the mistake 'to mix a politically cautious attitude regarding the survival of the past... with the truly reactionary respect for "the popular".'⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Antonio Gramsci, 'Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce', Einaudi, Turin, 1948, quoted in *ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ Cesare Luporini, , *op. cit.*, (1950) (b), p. 81.

Fortini is the author most critical of De Martino's thesis on the possibility of a popular progressive culture, when he argues that 'it is reactionary to accept that the working class has a superior culture to that of the avant-garde, which has been elaborated in the very focus of its dialectics with bourgeois culture. The proletariat is not the magically young carrier of a "new", newly born culture. This Jacobin truth must be said in a country with eight million illiterate people... The proletariat is not the chosen people. It only receives and carries out the politics, the science and the art produced by its organic intellectuals.'⁴¹⁸

Therefore, for Fortini, the duty of the organic intellectual was a pedagogic one. It consisted in spreading bourgeois avant-garde culture among the masses. Such bourgeois cultural forms should be the preliminary expressive tools that would enable the proletariat to systematise its worldview and constitute it, in the future, as differentiated from bourgeois culture. The Soviet case was not applicable in Italy because:

'If we understand "Proletarian culture" as the culture of the peoples of the "Revolutionary leap"... we must admit that the interest and importance of such

⁴¹⁷ Franco Fortini, 'Contro il mito del popolo', *Avanti!*, 22 April 1950 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), op. cit., p.114.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., pp.115 –116. In a reply published in *Avanti!*, Catalano accuses Fortini of perpetuating the schism between the intellectuals and the people, and between culture and politics, denying the existence and evident validity of the new cultural values generated by the proletariat. These values operated in two different ways: by means of the production of a spontaneous culture and by becoming the subject-matter of the traditional intellectuals' output:

'It is true that there are eight millions illiterate people in our country but, who can say that all these are inferior, in a political sense, in a vital sense, to those who regard themselves as intellectuals?

Does not the peasant's occupation of land in the "Mezzogiorno" create new cultural values, beyond the peasant themselves, in the traditional bourgeois intellectuals, who can be attracted towards the proletariat? (Franco Catalano, op. cit., p. 122).

[culture] for us is matched by the historical impossibility of assuming it as our own cultural form... This is a culture that has moved beyond developments that we must still strive for.⁴¹⁹

The preliminary task in the forging of a Revolutionary interpretation of the world is carried out by organic intellectuals who, to Fortini 'are not so in the name of a metaphysical "class destiny", of a determinism or a Proletarian racism. They are simply the intellectuals... who have chosen or have accepted, (from within their "intellectuality", which... has its roots in the thought and the technique of the dominant classes) the Proletarian class and its advanced theoretical fight... as the place, end, realm, language and meaning of their action.'⁴²⁰

De Martino's response included extensive empirical data aimed to show the subalterns as historically active subjects. To this end, he looked for those aspects in folklore that could not be explained as a deformed reflection of currently dominant or past cultures and, conversely, stood in opposition to them. As an example of what interested him, in a 1950 speech at the congress of Deputies, the Communist Minister of Agriculture, Fausto Gullo,⁴²¹ recounted that, in the part of Calabria where he was born, 'all the songs are

⁴¹⁹ Franco Fortini, 'Contro il mito del popolo', *'Avanti!'*, 22 April 1950 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), op. cit., p. 117.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p. 115.

⁴²¹ Until the defeat of the Left in the 1948 elections, Gullo had established a minimum wage for the day-labourers that could not be under 50% of the production. He also allowed the peasants to occupy uncultivated land, with the condition that they had to create co-operatives and sell the harvest to the State, and forbade contracts made by intermediaries between workers and employers, because this was one of the sources of funding of the Mafia.

laments; there is not a single happy popular song. All them are imbued with deep sorrow and appalling melancholy.⁴²²

Could these laments be a symptom of the achievement of a consciousness on the part of the impoverished 'Mezzogiorno' peasantry, as to its subordinate condition, and the prelude to its political articulation? The thesis of the progressive character of the folklore of the peasantry was more difficult to adhere to than was the case with the proletariat. Together with the links of solidarity born out of community, 'godfatherness' and family relationships, it was characteristic of southern thought to seek refuge in a diffuse Pagan religiosity, in the adoration of local saints, in rites that, in sum, were the expression of an autonomous culture, although these did not seek for liberation by secular means, but through trance, pilgrimages and miracles.⁴²³ Hence, it was easy for sympathetic intellectuals to fall into populism and mere apologetics for the archaic.

Alicata intervened in the debate in the same terms as Luporini. He criticised any 'romantic' and 'essential' conception of folklore. In his article II meridionalismo non si può fermare ad Eboli (Meridionalism Cannot stop at Eboli), published in Cronache meridionali in 1954, he argued that the division between art and folklore, characteristic of Crocean culture, moved certain intellectuals to conceive the South as another world, ruled by a different logic, still to be de-coded.

⁴²² Fausto Gullo, 'La riforma fondiaria: trent'anni dopo', Milan 1979, Vol. 1, pp. 428-430, quoted in Paul Ginsborg, *op. cit.*, pp. 33.

⁴²³ See Geoffrey Warner, *op. cit.*

The main target of Alicata's criticism was Levi and his book Cristo si è fermato a Eboli (Christ has stopped at Eboli, 1945), an account of his exile in Lucania,⁴²⁴ which had popularised the 'Mezzogiorno' question, in terms of a romantic myth of an essential peasant civilisation, unaltered by the historical changes brought by modernity. This placed peasant thought outside the realm of objective consciousness and did not attempt to produce a scientific historical explanation of its backward situation: 'Levi's intellectual schemes... may darken the real terms of the social evolution of the phenomenon.'⁴²⁵

'Mezzogiorno' literature divided city and countryside as if they were metaphysical, contradictory entities and proposed as a solution the action of pure politicians. For Alicata, this was not a part of the programme of the Marxist left, but Actionism, and corresponded to the unclear state of mind of leftist middle-class Liberal intellectuals.

Alicata warned that some intellectuals had joined a worker's party, but they 'still have difficulties assimilating all the teachings of Marxism.'⁴²⁶ This defect could be found in De Martino too, precisely due to Levi's influence.⁴²⁷ For Alicata, the debate on progressive folklore had been carried out at a too-theoretical level. De Martino had dressed up his thought with class concepts, but his belief in the primacy of politics did not evolve towards a conception of the party as the axis of the relationship between mass and intellectuals; and between folklore and high culture. Along the same lines as Alicata, the

⁴²⁴ See my sub-section: 'The "realisti"', pp. 299 and ff.

⁴²⁵ Mario Alicata, 'Il meridionalismo non si può fermare ad Eboli', 'Cronache meridionali', n° 9, year I, September 1954, pp. 585-603 in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), op. cit., p.195.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

anthropologist Carla Pasquinelli stresses that, in De Martino, 'the project of re-unification between the intellectuals and the people, despite its historical determination, lacks a unifying political moment which, in Gramsci, provides the possibility of re-unification.'⁴²⁸

In spite of these criticisms, the debate initiated by De Martino should not be excluded from the broad matrix of post-war Italian Marxism. Rather, it provides a complement to the principal focus on an analysis of superstructural processes and the search for a synthesis between mass culture and Modernism, taking Gramsci, Picasso and Soviet culture as the starting point. It was agreed that the contradictions between these cultural options matched the division of the country between Subaltern and leading classes, and between industrial North and agricultural South. Such divisions were reproduced even among the intellectual, peasant and worker members of the Left-wing bloc. Given the disparate origin of these groups, an eventual progressive popular culture would be a political question, in so far as it would depend on the success of these groups in establishing links and debates with each other. As Gramsci had argued, it would depend on the establishment of an 'academy' such as that which the PCI intended to become. Such an academy 'Should not be understood in an administrative or police-like sense, but in that of self-limitation of the leaders, that is: in the sense of a cultural politics.'⁴²⁹

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p.191.

⁴²⁸ Carla Pasquinelli, 'Gli intellettuali di fronte all'irrompere nella storia del mondo popolare subalterno' in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), op. cit., p. 17.

⁴²⁹ Antonio Gramsci, op. cit. (1992), p. 41.

The notion of the party-academy as a space for the rapprochement of progressive bourgeois culture with progressive politics and progressive social groups, was not only elaborated within the PCI. Professional groups of artists and critics were arriving at the same conclusion, not only as the result of political allegiances, but also because of a purely cultural analysis that took the question of the schism between modern artists and public as a chronic illness of Modern art. Much later, in 1968, Argan organised an 'International Conference of Artists, Critics and Exponents of the Arts' in Verucchio and Ferrara University to address the questions put forward by the debate inaugurated by De Martino twenty years earlier. Participants included Cirese; the historian of architecture Bruno Zevi; the director of the Cinema nuovo film review, Guido Aristarco; Umbro Apollonio, Corrado Maltese, Cesare Brandi, and other younger Italian academics.

The immediate objective of the conference was to reflect on the conditions for a modern progressive popular culture. Its starting point was an acknowledgement of the contradiction between progressive modernism and reactionary popular culture. Given that popular culture had a mass character, it could be said that it was democratic, though only in a quantitative sense, and not in the qualitative, critical sense of providing the people with tools to make conscious choices. Conversely, given that a large part of Modern art meant a challenge to institutionalised beliefs, it could be said that it was progressive, but, at the same time, it was elitist because it structurally lacked the means to relate to the majority.

The participants in the Verucchio conference were professional intellectuals who set themselves the task of elucidating their own relationship with popular culture. It could be argued that a sensitive approach to the people could be the result of preconceived political allegiances. If so, it was not a cultural matter in its own right. Nevertheless, the participants concluded that the very existence of the phenomenon of the social schism between intellectuals and masses had an explicit cultural dimension. In the introduction to the conference, Francesca Frantini stressed that the contradictions between popular art and artistic modernism meant that 'lack of communication and difficulty in understanding Modern art, has meant that many people have rejected any approach to artistic phenomena. As a consequence, the discussion about the role of art in contemporary society has taken on rather anguished and apocalyptic overtones.'⁴³⁰

In his contribution, Cirese harked back to the debate started by De Martino to put it in terms of a confrontation between 'populists' and 'aristocrats'.⁴³¹ For him, both intended to privilege one term over the other one. This presupposed two notions of art that claimed to have a universal value. However, art was a historical phenomenon. Any definition of what art was could not claim universal and a-historical validity without becoming ideological in the sense of 'assuming that subjects which belong to one's own historical condition, are universal and superior values.'⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Francesca Frantini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁴³¹ Alberto Cirese, 'per una nozione scientifica di arte popolare', in *Ibid.* p.11

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p.13.

Historically, aesthetic experience was the expression of a worldview.

However, from a PCI point of view, the post-war situation seemed to be defined by the simultaneous crisis of all the traditional artistic disciplines, due to their incapacity to produce such a worldview. As Argan put it, 'an art of the people has not succeeded the art of the bourgeoisie, which has produced many masterpieces, but has now closed it's historic cycle...' ⁴³³ That is why he wondered about the status of art in a period when it has become detached from society. Art's inner dynamics had entered into contradiction with its social role as the expression of universally-accepted values; and this had led to 'a situation of crisis'. ⁴³⁴

The only way to overcome such a crisis was to return to a sense of purpose for the arts. Argan stressed, however, that 'aesthetic research must be both autonomous and instrumental; it is necessary that society uses it as far as it is autonomous because, if it was not so, and was instrumental, it would be worse than useless. Only if power did not consist in the pressure of some groups upon others, but in society's self-government, could science collaborate with politics without betraying itself. The same can be said about aesthetic research.' ⁴³⁵

Argan sets himself to scrutinise the way in which 'the search for an idea of 'the people' has been conducted in the arts. We have to recognise such a search for what it is: an attempt to found Modern art as a popular art both by

⁴³³ Giulio Carlo Argan, op. cit. (1968), p.32.

⁴³⁴ Giulio Carlo Argan, op. cit. (1970), p. 634.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

necessity and by one's own historic choice.'⁴³⁶ Thus, the scope of the conference was to establish whether 'modern art can be popular art... [and] under which conditions Modern art can achieve a mass character.'⁴³⁷

For Modern artists and critics, the move towards 'the others', towards mass art, implied a radical rethinking of their own status. According to Argan, on this rethinking depended the renewal of art and criticism; and implied a re-definition of the artistic dimension beyond the Modernist definition of art:

'Art is not a trans-historical universal, but a human social practice. It had a beginning. It can have also a historic end. Art may end up the same as the pagan mythologies, alchemy, Feudalism and crafts. However, Christianity succeeded Paganism, science succeeded alchemy, the monarchies and, then, the bourgeois state succeeded Feudalism, Industry succeeded crafts. What can succeed art?'⁴³⁸

Nevertheless, a Modern popular art, that would be the adequate historic development of Modern art, implies a context of conditions of production and reception that were completely different from those supplied by a mass society and a consumer culture, where spectators passively receive the products manufactured by a culture industry. It implies, in short, not only the mere popularisation of Modernism, but also a qualitative evolution of the means of mass communication and the masses themselves that had a political character.

⁴³⁶ Giulio Carlo Argan, *op. cit.* (1968), p.32.

⁴³⁷ Francesca Frantini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

In the conference, such a process was not only put in terms of an artistic programme, or something critics prescribe to artists. It was the foreseeable conclusion of a generalised tendency towards secularism or de-sacralisation of the arts, which now, have become commodities.⁴³⁹ As people themselves are subordinated to the market as well, there is a linkage between the crisis of art and the wider historic crisis of Capitalism. The participants in the 1968 conference arrived at the same point as Communist intellectuals of the immediate post-war Period, when Guttuso had written that: 'We are, now, in the process of fighting for the transformation of this monstrous society because this is the condition for the renewal of culture. At the same time, we know that we must give our revolutionary contribution for such a transformation as people of culture.'⁴⁴⁰

Controversial politicised mass cultural expressions, such as the 'realisti' and Socialist Realism, had given rise to a series of disagreements within the art world. In the face of these, the artistic establishment which, in post-war Italy, had adhered to the canon of Formalism, insisted on the autonomy of art and the distinction between art and mass culture. On the other side, politically engaged Mass culture supporters proclaimed the death of established Modern art. They treated the specific artistic crisis as the mere symptom of the historic process of bourgeois decay; and set themselves to reflect its historic

⁴³⁸ Giulio Carlo Argan, op. cit. (1970), p. 605.

⁴³⁹ See Franco Ferrarotti, 'Alcune osservazioni sociologiche sull'arte popolare e sull'estetica sperimentale', Arte popolare moderna, Gli incontri di Verrucchio, Cappelli editore, Rocca san Casciano, 1968.

⁴⁴⁰ Renato Guttuso, Mangiatori di crepuscoli (in scatola), author's draft for Vie nuove, n. 6, 6 February 1949 (d), p. 4.

opposite: the workers' movement. However, Modern art tried to escape criticism for its neglect of social duties by proclaiming its autonomy. At the same time, though, Modern art lacked the criteria to clearly distinguish art from non-art, because there cannot be a priori artistic judgements. So, when Modern mass culture is not assimilated, and such a distinction between art and mass culture is made, art's autonomy becomes reactionary, the establishment of artistic prejudices, and a crisis started. For Argan, crisis is the natural state of art under Capitalism. However, upon its confrontation with mass culture, Modern art evolves until such crisis become conscious and, thus, the current topic of art:

'If we want to speak on popular art, having acknowledged that the people have been substituted by the mass, we only can speak of mass art. Otherwise, we must expect a revolution within the mass. Yet, we have realised that such a revolution cannot take the intellectual environment as its starting point. Due to its own specialised and qualified character, the intellectual environment is becoming increasingly restricted. Therefore, [if we want to talk about popular art] we must have in mind an economic and political revolution.'⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴¹ Conclusion of the 'Arte popolare moderna' conference, in Francesca Frantini (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 145.

PART TWO: ART AND COMMUNISM IN POST-WAR ITALY

1 THE FORGING OF AN ANTI-FASCIST CONSCIOUSNESS IN ITALIAN ART

1. Antecedents: Critical Tendencies of the 1930s

1.a Art and Fascism.

All expressions of inter-war Italian art were infiltrated by Fascist values.

However, not all manifestations of Fascist art were the result of provincialism and isolation. The same as in politics, Fascism produced an original cultural option that included a critical discourse regarding international Modernism.⁴⁴²

Politicised Classicism, which was reminiscent of Roman imperial grandeur, was in a preferential position in Italy during the Fascist period. Nevertheless, the regime did not produce a unified artistic doctrine.⁴⁴³ The concepts of 'Romanità' (Romanity), 'Italianità' (Italianity) 'Latinità' (Latinity) or 'Mediterraneità' (Mediterraneity), which characterised the Fascists' cultural output, were not always an expression of anti-Modernism, exacerbated nationalism and Imperialism. Rather, these terms acted as a matrix of different styles liable to different interpretation. For example, Lionello Venturi,

⁴⁴² Emily Braun, op. cit. (1995), p. 88.

⁴⁴³ According to Braun:

'In fact the period was characterised by pluralism and eclecticism in art, as the result of a relatively open cultural policy (compared to that of Nazi Germany) and Mussolini's refusal to support a group or any style exclusively, despite the considerable efforts of many artists and

who later had to go into exile, equated 'Italianity' to a cosmopolitan spirit, and Mario Broglio's Valori plastici review proclaimed a new Classicism both inspired by the past and expressed by the new means provided by Modern art.⁴⁴⁴

Valori plastici held an ambiguous perspective of both continuation and rejection of Modern art and devoted itself to linking art and material reconstruction after World War I. It counted on contributions by exponents of 'Pittura Metafisica' such as De Chirico and Savinio; and published information about artists such as Picasso, Georges Braque, George Grosz, Neoplasticism, the Russian avant-garde and Vassilii Kandinsky. From its pages, however, Carlo Carrà sought to restore the 'Italian principle of painting', which he regarded as a recurrent motif of the history of Western art that appeared every time that artists needed to assert the socially constructive necessity of their creations:

'We want Italian art to return to order, method and discipline; we want it to acquire a secure style, with a body and a form, a form that is similar and, however –according to the exigencies of our time- that is different from that of the ancient masters... We see time and again, in the history of Western art,

critics to see their work declared the official art of the State. The avant-garde and the retrograde coexisted'. (Emily Braun, op. cit., (1989), p. 173).

⁴⁴⁴ Broglio published Valori plastici between 1918 and 1922. The journal devoted itself to the furtherance of a new Classicism that, at the same time, was inspired by the past and took advantage of the discoveries of Modern art. See Joan M. Lukach, 'Giorgio Morandi and Modernism in Italy Between the Wars' in Emily Braun (ed.), op. cit. (1989), p. 157.

that the Italian principle appears every time that an European painter wants to make a radical remark about the constructive impulse of his work.'⁴⁴⁵

As the regime developed in a reactionary direction, the nationalist drive in Italian art acquired more tangible isolationist and anti-Modern connotations, along the line of the German 'Heimatstijl'. A large number of Italian Modern artists had supported the Fascists during the early 1920s. From the late 1920's, however, the 'Partito Nazionale Fascista' developed a cultural policy that presented the regime as the culmination of Roman culture, and inverted the internationalist connotations of Classicism, implicit in experiences such as Valori plastici, to present the Italian national heritage as an expression of national purity, in contrast to Modern art.⁴⁴⁶

The major artistic events sponsored by the state demonstrate this tendency from the early 1930s.⁴⁴⁷ For example, in the catalogue of the 1930 Venice Biennale, Antonio Maraini, the head of the Union of Sculptors, opposed Fascist art to a preceding negative period characterised by Cosmopolitanism:

'In a word, we have returned to the example of our glorious tradition, as a repository of the ideals of Mediterranean Classicism, after decades of progressive estrangement in the babel-like confusion of all exoticism, from the most refined to the most barbaric, and of all primitivisms, from the most

⁴⁴⁵ Quoted in Guido Ballo, Modern Italian Painting, from Futurism to the Present Day, London, Thames and Hudson, 1958, p. 48.

⁴⁴⁶ See Joan M. Lukach, op. cit. (1989), p. 183; Philip V. Cannistaro, op. cit., p. 152; and Günter Berghaus, op. cit.

⁴⁴⁷ See Pia Vivarelli, 'Personalities and Styles in Figurative art of the thirties, in Emily Braun (ed.), op. cit. (1989), p. 182.

authentic to the most artificial. Will tomorrow finally bring a resurgence of Latinity, an aspiration towards sanctity and beauty, to clear, expressive, harmonious meaning and an immediate correspondence between form and substance.'⁴⁴⁸

In addition, Italian art increasingly became dependent on the state apparatus and the collateral organisations of the regime. During the second half of the 1920's, an all-embracing artistic structure became consolidated, including a Union of Fine Artists; a system of prizes and commissions; and a series of State agencies.⁴⁴⁹ With initiatives such as this, the regime did not impose an aesthetic, but, by means of patronage, it tended to exclude other views of the Italian people uncongenial to its militaristic, isolationist and Imperialist politics; or to the cult of personality of the Fascist leaders. However, there were no exhibitions of degenerate art or generalised prohibitions in Italy, at least until 1938, when the racial laws were passed.⁴⁵⁰ The art critic Margherita Sarfatti had to go into exile that year but, earlier, she had led 'Novecento', a diversified collective organised on Fascist grounds that, following Valori Plastici, had sought both to be national and modern; and had assimilated the

⁴⁴⁸ Antonio Maraini, Sala 3-Salone centrale, XVIII Mostra internazionale d'arte di Venezia, Venice 1930, p. 30, quoted in Pia Vivarelli, 'Personalities and Styles in Figurative Art of the Thirties' in Emily Braun (ed.), op. cit., p. 184.

⁴⁴⁹ such as the 'Istituto fascista di cultura' (Fascist Institute of Culture), established in 1925, and the 'Reale accademia d'Italia' (Royal Academy of Italy), created in 1926. (See Philip V. Cannistaro, op. cit. Regarding the Venice 'Biennale', the Fascist Government took over responsibility from Venice Council; and, in 1930, the event became an independent agency ('Ente autonomo') directed by the sculptor Antonio Maraini. Instead of independence, this resulted in a stronger influence of the Fascist trade unions, and the overwhelming presence of 'Novecento' artists in the Italian rooms. But this situation had been counteracted by the independence enjoyed by the foreign pavilions, so that, in the 1930 exhibition, for example, one could see works by artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Renoir, Moore, Dix or Klee. (See Erika La Rosa, 'La Biennale di Venezia', in Various Authors, Il 1950, premi ed esposizioni nell'Italia del dopoguerra, XX premio nazionale arti visive città di Gallarate, Civica galleria d'arte moderna, Comune di Gallarate, 19 novembre 2000-11 febbraio 2001, Nicolini editore, Gallarate, 2001, pp. 123-124).

most rational aspects of European art for its programme of 'return to order'.⁴⁵¹

Sarfatti explicitly criticised the bad taste of the 'Partito nazionale fascista' (National Fascist Party) apparatus and the theatrical iconography of Roman backdrops, salutes and constant historical parallelisms, which was characteristic of its rallies. These were, for Sarfatti, aesthetically alien to the real Fascist ideology and the spirit of 'Romanità'.⁴⁵²

After Sarfatti's fall, however, 'Novecento' evolved into a kind of politically illustrative art which characterised events such as the Cremona Prize. This was an initiative of the Minister of the PNF, Roberto Farinacci. It took place from 1939 and was intended to celebrate the production of figurative and monumental works.⁴⁵³ The first exhibition asked artists to develop the theme 'Listening to the Discourse of the Duce on the Radio', and was won by Alessandro Pomi with a painting that showed the stagnation of the figurative patterns to illustrate the regime's dogmas. Still, Pomi incorporates some concern with the form of the representation, with a powerful volumetric treatment of the figures.

In fact, even the most reactionary expressions of Fascist art never ceased to employ technical developments of Modern art when they were of use to

⁴⁵⁰ See Emily Braun, op. cit., (1989), p 353.

⁴⁵¹ See Joan M. Lukach, op. cit. (1989), p 157.

⁴⁵² See Margherita Sarfatti, 'Arte, fascismo e antiretorica', Critica Fascista, 1 March 1927, pp. 82-84.

⁴⁵³ The Cremona Prize was part of Farinacci's wider anti-Modernist artistic policy. For its part, Telesio Interlandi's Quadrivio journal had started an anti-Semitic campaign already in 1934; and it was joined in 1938 by the La difesa della razza and Il Tevere newspapers. The latter published a list of 'degenerate' artists in 1938 that included Marinetti, Carlo Carrà, Giorgio De Chirico, Corrado Cagli, Gino Severini, Renato Birolli, Mauro Reggiani, Lucio Fontana, Gino Ghiringhelli, Atanasio Soldati, Pietro Lingheri and Giuseppe Terragni. (See Philip V. Cannistaro, op. cit, p 153.

intensify the visual strength of its propaganda.⁴⁵⁴ For example, there had existed, in the 1930s, a group of Abstract artists in Lombardy with headquarters at Milan's Galleria del milione, the Como group of architects and Monza's School of applied arts.⁴⁵⁵ These artists produced a Nationalist version of Abstract art and functional architecture stripped of any decoration which was inspired by the 'Quattrocento' and Mediterranean Classicism. They considered their art as 'the expression of a geometric spirit that could only tolerate purity.'⁴⁵⁶ Examples of their political efficacy include Giuseppe Terragni's House of the Fascio of Como [Illustration 28]. This building consists in a transparent geometrical structure of iron and steel which acted as metonym of Fascist administrative efficacy, practical sense and

⁴⁵⁴ Another example of the use of Modernist technical resources for propagandistic ends is the 1933 competition for a monument in Turin to the Duke of Aosta, one of the protagonists of the African campaign, (See Rosanna Maggio Serra on Arturo Martini in Rossana Maggio Serra and Riccardo Passoni, Il Novecento, catalogo delle opere esposte, Musei civici di Torino, Galleria civica d'arte moderna e contemporanea and Fabbri, Turin, 1993, p. 179 and ff.). The sculptor Arturo Martini planned a scheme titled Prince, Tribune, Commander, in partnership with the architect Giuseppe Pagano, with the portrait of the Duke flanked by two figures, Faith and Strength. These virtues were represented by a combination of standing human figure and rampant animal. (See Maria Teresa Roberto's, commentary on Eugenio Baroni's Monument to the Duke of Aosta in Rossana Maggio Serra and Riccardo Passoni, op. cit. (1993), p. 185). In successive phases of the competition Pagano and Martini added more figures. (See *ibid.*) In the second phase (1934), the central space was occupied by a group of two figures titled Incontro di San Marco e San Giusto (Meeting of St. Mark and St. Justine) [Illustration 32]. There, as the painter Alberto Savinio wrote, the patrons of, respectively, Venice and Trieste evoked 'an ideal of peace, brotherhood and liberation...' (Alberto Savinio's presentation of the entry, quoted in Maria Teresa Roberto's commentary on Arturo Martini in Rossana Maggio Serra and Riccardo Passoni, op. cit., p. 186). In the third phase (1935), Martini placed the Duke between two groups of caryatids, each supporting a clepsydra. The clepsydra would symbolise the Duke himself as the synthesis of the virtues represented by the figures.

In contrast to Martini and Pagano's convoluted complex of erudite allusions to the values of justice, spirituality and resolution that the Duke incarnated, another entrant, Eugenio Baroni, had planned two lines of four soldiers at both sides of the Duke, in the Classical 'contraposto' position, with Futurist-like sharp angles that suggested military strength [Illustration 33]. The Turinese art historian Maria Teresa Roberto writes that, at the time, 'the critics argued over the plastic and material qualities of [Martini's] figures, while the regime's military did not hesitate to choose [Eugenio] Baroni's more eloquent and austere sketch' (*Ibid.* p. 187) because of 'the exactness of the equipment and the severity of the pose.' (Quoted in *ibid.* p. 200).

⁴⁵⁵ The Milanese 'Galleria del milione', which edited the architectural journal Casabella, the architects' 'Group of Como' and the Monza School of Applied Arts.

⁴⁵⁶ Carlo Belli, 'Kn', quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 189.

transparency, with a bare wall on the left-hand side which could be employed to project images.

1b. The Crisis of the Fascist Cultural Left

As Fascist taste became more conservative and rejected any art that could not be used as an illustration of its politics, a sector of Fascist artists, responded to what they regarded as regression from the original revolutionary tenets of the movement with the abandonment of Futurist formal conventions for a mass revolutionary art, expressed by different figurative means, intended to return to the movement's original workerist principles. 'Strapaese' was a small association of artists and writers that appeared during the second half of the 1920s, in Tuscany and the Emilia-Romagna; and was characterised by their radical anti-internationalism and anti-avant-gardism. This group of, literally, 'super-villagers', was composed by Mario Maccari, the editor of Il Selvaggio, Leo Longanesi, editor of L'Italiano, Mino Maccari, Lorenzo Viani and Rosai. Artists and intellectuals of all trends became related to the group in one way or another, from Ardengo Soffici, Ricci, Carlo Carrà and Giorgio Morandi to some future Anti-Fascists such as Guttuso, Mafai and Giacomo Manzú.⁴⁵⁷

The 'Strapaese' employed a deliberately regressive artistic language that expressed either repentance for their Modernist, 'bourgeois' past, or the continuation of the Futurist strategy of avant-garde antagonism towards

⁴⁵⁷ These illustrated some issues of Il selvaggio during the early 1940s. See Emily Braun, op. cit. (1995), endnote 12.

official culture. Despite being familiar with international developments, they fiercely stood for the provincial and common against Cosmopolitanism and snobbery.

Braun writes that 'Strapaese' artists 'associated the popular with stubborn sameness, political independence and the resolutely antibourgeois.'⁴⁵⁸

Accordingly, they produced a kind of art concentrated on its mass communicability and, therefore, broadly based on conventional figuration. For them, however, in Braun's words, 'the "people" by definition were those who toiled the soil, and whose rootedness in the cycles of nature and folk rituals served as a bulwark against the foreign, the urbane, and the industrial modern.'⁴⁵⁹

Rosai is the artist who exemplifies best the character of the group. His politics were, at the same time, populist and anti-Socialist. He was a committed trade unionist and 'Ardito', and had belonged to the 'Fascio politico futurista', participating in the raids against institutionalised Socialism during the early 1920s.⁴⁶⁰ Yet he took his distance from 'Squadristo' when he perceived Fascist violence to be directed to actual workers. His attitude did not evolve towards organised anti-Fascism nevertheless but, after his expulsion from the PNF, he became a cultural troublemaker who argued in vain for the return of lost original Fascist values.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁸ See Ibid., p. 93.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ See Günter Berghaus, op. cit.; and Guido Ballo, op. cit.

⁴⁶¹ Giuseppe Nicoletti writes that Rosai joined an early anti-Fascist group, 'L'Italia libera', although this 'did not entail for Rosai a conversion to militant anti-Fascism –The ideas and the political culture that were expressed through anti-Fascism were too remote for him- but it

Rosai's models are workers, homeless people or vagrants, depicted with proximity and solidarity. Yet they do not lack monumentality, suggested by the powerful, static, volumetric treatment of the figure, a feature that Rosai often mixes with a drawing that tends to grotesque deformations [Illustration 31]. Braun writes that 'the atmospheric touch of his brushwork and the roughness of his plebeian physiognomies evoke a sense both nostalgic and subversive... Rosai's canvases celebrate an anarchic and gruff humanity that eludes both social propriety and civil control.'⁴⁶²

The relationship of 'Strapaese' with the late 1930s anti-Fascist 'Corrente' group and post-war Leftist Realism has been documented by some critics. In 1949, the Americans James Thrall Soby and Alfred H. Barr, intuitively called Rosai a 'Social Realist', and compared him with Guttuso.⁴⁶³ Also Braun explicitly suggests that the postulates of certain expressions of Fascist art laid the ground for the evolution of some of their features into post-war Italian Communism: for example, the stress on mass communicability and on the conflict between populism and Modernism. In fact, the 'Strapaese' held an ambiguous political status after the war. While Soffici joined the German-supported Italian Social Republic, which eventually led to his execution by the partisans, Morandi was regarded as a hero because he was arrested for a

represented a gesture of private rebellion and subversive sympathy for a spirited minority, and it virtually signified his wish, now that all illusions had been stripped away, to disavow the "revolutionary" passion of the returning ex-soldier, passion that had been so poorly expended.' Quoted in Emily Braun, op. cit. (1995), endnote 43.

⁴⁶² Ibid., p. 105.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p. 99. See also James Thrall Soby and Alfred H. Barr, Twentieth-Century Italian Art, catalogue of an exhibition on Twentieth-Century Italian art held at New York Museum of Modern Art. Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1949, p. 29-30.

brief period in 1943, and Rosai even exhibited in Communist-sponsored artistic events, such as the 1948 Suzzara Prize.⁴⁶⁴

Another example of the reaction against Fascist propagandistic neo-classicism is provided by the Milan-based painter Mario Sironi. He viewed the 'meticulous Nordic Realism'⁴⁶⁵ promoted by the PNF hierarchy as an attempt to reduce the people's taste to 'the lowest common denominator'⁴⁶⁶ by rejecting Modern art and presenting them, instead, with 'images of women with red lips and plump blond babies with pink cheeks.'⁴⁶⁷

Farinacci, in turn, criticised Sironi's use of Modernist expressive devices, which he considered as 'degenerate', and called him, ironically, 'the painter of big feet'.⁴⁶⁸ However, Sironi was always a target out of his range. He was a highly regarded first-time 'Ardito', a founder of the 'Fasci di combattimento', had participated in the 1922 March on Rome; and Mussolini himself had provided him with a secure base in his fight against the nazification of Italian art by appointing him art critic of his mouthpiece, Il popolo d'Italia.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁴ See Emily Braun, op. cit. (1995), p. 105. Also, my section: 'The "realisti"' on pp. 299 and ff.

⁴⁶⁵ Mario Sironi, 'Arte e tecnica della mostra "Schafendes Volk" di Düsseldorf', La rivista, November 1937, in Mario Sironi, 'Scritti', quoted in Emily Braun, op. cit. (1989), p. 179.

⁴⁶⁶ Emily Braun, op. cit. (1989), p. 179.

⁴⁶⁷ Mario Sironi, 'Gusti borghesi', in 'Scritti', Quoted in Emily Braun, op. cit. (1989), p. 179. Sironi's attack clearly pointed to Farinacci and his Il regime fascista newspaper, which accused him of making 'Jew art' in 1938. For his part, Mussolini played a double game and allowed him to publish his theories in his official mouthpieces, the Il popolo d'Italia newspaper and the Rivista illustrata del popolo d'Italia.

⁴⁶⁸ Quoted in Emily Braun, op. cit. (1989), p. 180. See also Luigi Cavallo, 'Mario Sironi, disegno impronta, sigla e simbolo dell'uomo', in the catalogue of the exhibition Mario Sironi/disegni, La scaletta, Reggio Emilia, 1999, p.7.

⁴⁶⁹ See Emily Braun, op. cit. (1989).

After World War I, Sironi produced a series of industrial landscapes of lead-like shadowy whites, greys, browns and dark reds, populated by enigmatic figures which lack Futurist confidence in the liberating power of industrialisation and, rather, recall Giorgio De Chirico's enigmatic and upsetting urban landscapes.⁴⁷⁰ De Chirico provides historico-political insights into the nature of Italy by presenting the familiar Ferrarese Renaissance architecture in a climate of estrangement. But his politics of modernity is only allusive. He was more concerned, for example, with the technical issue of the problems Cubist posed for traditional perspectival space.

In contrast with De Chirico, Sironi's intellectual unease had an almost exclusively political origin. This prevented him from merely focusing on the paradoxes of pictorial representation; and, during the 1930s, it spurred him on to a solution of these by means of monumental allegories of Italy. These characteristically took the form of peasants and workers depicted in rude and hieratic poses, disposed in heroic manner across timeless, de-particularised spaces.

These works still incorporate Cubist features, including expressive freedom; and the sense of rhythm and composition, which Sironi thought could enrich his project of a mass political art. The passage from one artistic conception to

⁴⁷⁰ Metaphysical painting was a prestigious remnant of pre-war culture that still exercised some influence in the artistic milieu over the 1920s. De Chirico's ambiguous references to Classicism counterweighted its use for the ends of a politically explicit art. His work addressed the historic absence of 'Romantà' and, as the art historian Valeriano Bozal has written, 'emptiness becomes the real protagonist...' (Valeriano Bozal, 'El arte de entreguerras' en 'La cultura de entreguerras', *Siglo XX historia universal*, Historia 16, Madrid, 1984, p. 71). De Chirico wrote in 1919 that a real artwork must express a 'plastic solitude... the spectral aspect of the subject.' (Giorgio De Chirico, 'Sull'arte metafisica', *Valori plastici*, issues 4-5, 1919, p. 5, quoted in Emily Braun, op. cit. (1989), p. 157.

the other was also eased by the influence of Futurism, which had detached Cubism from the realm of geometry and Parisian cosmopolitanism, and historicised it as typical of European industrial society: thus signalling the possibility of its overcoming in a different historical situation.

This interface of influences resulted in a kind of hybrid painting where 'Pittura Metafisica' provided the starting point; Fascist ideology constituted the objective; and Cubism and Futurism supplied the means for a far-reaching programme of restoration of the social function of art. As Luigi Cavallo writes, 'Sironi intended to produce 'a completely rounded picture of modern man, rescuing man from the position of a poor metaphysical puppet and placing him in a re-discovered classicism.'⁴⁷¹

It is in this way that Sironi connects with the montage experiences that blossomed in the Soviet Union from the first half of the 1920s and consciously sought for an evolution from Modernism to a kind of art committed to social construction in post-revolutionary regimes. He had met El Lissitzsky at the 1928 Dresden 'Pressa', an international press exhibition where Sironi himself and Giovanni Muzzo designed the Italian pavilion and became familiar with the Russian designer's technique of juxtaposition of different scales and anti-illusionist spaces.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Luigi Cavallo, op. cit., p.8.

⁴⁷² Sironi acknowledged Lissitzsky's influence in 'L'architettura della Rivoluzione', article in 'Il popolo d'Italia', November 18, 1932, reprinted in Sironi, scritti editi e inediti, Milan, 1980, p. 175.

Like Lissitzky, Sironi ended up abandoning easel painting and art exhibitions for large-scale works conceived to be integrated in public architecture.

Despite their common vindication of the masses as a politically legitimate audience for art, however, Sironi's art took a different course to

Constructivism over the 1930s, regarding the terms of the relationship between artists and public. He established hierarchical conditions in the process of artistic communication and regarded style as a means of interpreting, inspiring and persuading: an element of art that should be passively assimilated by a collective audience. In his own words: 'the educational function of painting is above all a question of style. Rather than through the subject-matter (the Communist approach) it is through style that art will succeed in making a new mark on the popular consciousness.'⁴⁷³

Conversely, Soviet Constructivist artists increasingly tended to consider the form as integral to the subject matter; and they did not regard themselves as 'artists' in Sironi's way, but as 'engineers'. This, in some cases, evolved into the abandonment of montage techniques for a 'factographic' representation of social reality in the period of triumphant Communism.⁴⁷⁴

Morandi can be considered the other pole of the Italian inter-war constellation. He shared the 'Strapaese' interest for the common and vulgar, but he rejected their political programme and their tendency to monumental art. This was because of his lack of interest in Futurism and his formation as a painter in the other main pre-Fascist Modern art trend: the 'Pittura Metafisica'.

⁴⁷³ Mario Campigli, Carlo Carrà, Achille Funi and Mario Sironi, 'Manifesto della pittura murale, 'La colonna', December de 1933, quoted in Emily Braun, op. cit., (1989), p. 179.

⁴⁷⁴ See Benjamin Buchloh, 'From Faktura to Factography' in Richard Bulton (ed.), The Contest of Meaning, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999, pp. 49-86.

Indeed, Morandi shows an intellectual state of mind which is more congenial with pre-Fascist Modern artists such as De Chirico, than with Marinetti, Rosai and Sironi's firm political beliefs. Morandi's relationship with De Chirico is in evidence in his very early work. Thereafter, when his pictorial idiom achieves maturity, Morandi enriches the expressive resources of the latter, namely, his emphasis on drawing to produce subtle intersections of perspectives, with a greater attention to colour. He organises colours in ranges of tonal disharmonies in order to isolate the figures. Thereby, he puts into question the very idea of a unified Renaissance picture-space, which is also one of De Chirico's objectives.

Both artists aimed at showing the problematicity of providing a fixed or 'natural' notion of the relationship of the single elements of the painting with the whole. De Chirico, however, intended to open a debate on the meaning of history and the Italian self-image by reverting to allusions to Classical architecture; while Morandi deliberately focused on politically-neutral subject-matter, such as landscape and still-life, with the intention of preventing his painting from increasing the stock of Fascist imagery [Illustration 32].⁴⁷⁵

1.c. Dissident art of the 1930s

Despite Fascist attempts to control Italian art by means of controlling the market, artists such as Rosai, Sironi and Morandi survived as prestigious,

though isolated figures. Nevertheless, the situation was not as easy for younger artists who refused to become integrated in the regime's cultural machinery. Only the help of Bottai, the Minister of Education;⁴⁷⁶ and the support of private collectors and cultural entrepreneurs, allowed the appearance of several groups of artists, critical of the establishment, in the margins of Italian art.⁴⁷⁷

Bottai was aware of the dangers of a progressive detachment of the intelligentsia from Fascism as the regime's conservatism increased; and sought in vain to reach an agreement with the newest representatives of Italian art. To this end, he edited the Primato fortnightly review, published in Rome between March 1939 and June 1943, with the collaboration of young artists such as Guttuso, Pirandello, Mafai and Scipione (Gino Bonichi). He also created the 'Ufficio per l'arte contemporanea' (Contemporary Arts Office); as well as the Bergamo Prize. This became a forum where Primato collaborators, as well as others including Giuseppe Santomaso, Migneco, Morlotti, Pio Semeghini, Francesco Menzio and Treccani could show their work in opposition to the conservative figuration associated with Farinacci's Cremona Prize.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ See Joan M. Lukach, op. cit. (1989). Recently, Emily Braun has questioned the widely acknowledge neutrality of Morandi's subject-matter, to suggest an approach to 'Strapaese.' For this alternative reading, see Emily Braun, op. cit., 1995.

⁴⁷⁶ For further information, see Giuseppe Bottai, 'Interventismo della cultura', 1 June 1940, reprinted in www.Scuolaromana.it. Also Pia Vivarelli, 'Personalities and Styles in Figurative art of the Thirties', and Philip V. Cannistaro, op. cit.

⁴⁷⁷ See Pia Vivarelli, 'Personalities and Styles in Figurative Art of the Thirties' in Emily Braun (ed.), op. cit. (1989).

⁴⁷⁸ See Vittorio Fagone, 'Da Bergamo a Bergamo, due stagioni di un premio di pittura', Various Authors, Il 1950, premi ed esposizioni nell'Italia del dopoguerra, XX premio nazionale

However, these initiatives were strongly contested by the majority of the PNF apparatus. Farinacci called the Bergamo Prize: 'a Trojan horse for the return of Judaism. [It promotes] an art of nasty clouds [ie. Impressionism], Hebrew cylinders [i.e. artists such as Léger?], broken-up malicious faces [i.e. Cubism], sick bodies, elephantiasis and drunken stupid people [i. e. expressionism]. To sum up: [It is] a rhetorical monstrous and lying art'.⁴⁷⁹ For its part, Il Tevere journal regarded it as '[the kind of art] that salon people like. [The art] of more or less decadent intellectuals; and those who do not know how to do anything better than look to Paris... and its more or less Hebrew artists and critics... We are in 1940, the year of France's defeat. Shouldn't she be defeated in art as well?'⁴⁸⁰

Under these pressures, a characteristic of Italian critical artists of the 1930s was their fragmentation into local centres with scarcely any relationship to each other. They all had in common an interest in European art, although their awareness of the latest developments beyond the Alps was uneven. The Turinese were interested in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, by then ancient history in France. The Milanese counted on the presence of Sironi; Edoardo Persico's 'Il milione' gallery; the Group of Como; and Mucchi's house, which became a meeting point for young artists to discuss current international artistic and political developments. Finally, Rome produced during the 1930s a bohemian marginalised group of artists with a lively interest in Expressionism, the 'Roman School'; and well-furnished

arti visive città di Gallarate, Civica galleria d'arte moderna, Comune di Gallarate, 19 novembre 2000-11 febbraio 2001, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴⁷⁹ Farinacci, Roberto, in 'Il regime fascista', Cremona, 13 October 1940, quoted in Vittorio Fagone, op. cit., p. 36.

archives, such as the 'Centro sperimentale di cinematografia' (Centre for Experimental Filmmaking), established in 1935 where, according to the Abstract artist Achille Perilli, 'One could see everything.'⁴⁸¹

1c.I Turin

The first artists who began to operate completely outside the regime's parameters were the 'Sei di Torino' (Six of Turin). This was a group formed in 1929 by Menzio [Illustration 33], Carlo Levi [Illustration 34], Enrico Paulucci [Illustration 35], Nicola Galante [Illustration 36], Gigi Chessa [Illustration 37] and Jessie Boswell [Illustration 38].⁴⁸² They depicted down-to-earth themes, mainly landscapes and portraits, on Impressionist and Postimpressionist lines, which departed from Nationalism and explicitly political overtones, by emphasising technique and colour; and relying on intimate subject-matter. Pia Vivarelli has pointed to the political component of the apparently 'a-political' art of the 'Sei' and writes that: 'it was precisely this poetic lyricism that moved many critics, even the most perceptive, to mistake or simply to ignore the subtle protest of the group against cultural autarky. This protest was implicit in the strategy of affinity with the European tradition;'⁴⁸³ and the Turinese art historian Rossana Maggio Serra explains that Turin painting of those decades was characterised by 'a diffuse sensibility for a pictorial expression rich of colours and tonalism... This made it a free area from the

⁴⁸⁰ Giuseppe Pensabene, 'Pulpiti nell'ombra', *Il Tevere*, 8 October 1940, quoted in *ibid*, p. 36.

⁴⁸¹ See Nadja Perilli's interview to Achille Perilli on Mino Guerrini, *Cronaca di Forma 1, 1946/1951*, Various Authors, catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, Rome Council and La Sapienza University, Gangemi editore, 2001, p. 73.

⁴⁸² See Rossana Maggio Serra, 'Torino tra le due guerre', in Rossana Maggio Serra and Riccardo Passoni, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

⁴⁸³ Pia Vivarelli, 'Personalities and Styles in Figurative Art of the Thirties' in Emily Braun (ed.), *op. cit.* (1989), p. 183.

calls to Italianess and Classicism represented by Margherita Sarfatti's "Novecento" and the order wanted by the regime.⁴⁸⁴

The 'Sei' represented the starting point of a process that would eventually evolve from artists' conscious detachment from public issues towards a clearer political awareness and a more openly political opposition to the Regime. Levi remained the most hostile to 'Novecento' and Fascism.⁴⁸⁵ He was a founding member of the 'Giustizia e libertà' group and, after two arrests in 1934, was exiled in Lucania.⁴⁸⁶ For their part, when this oppositional role of the group became more explicit, Chessa, Boswell and Galante resigned.⁴⁸⁷

1c.II Milan

In Milan, Sironi's politicised versions of Cubism, Metaphysics and Futurism; and Como's nationalist Modernism, began to be opposed, from the early 1930s, by younger artists, such as Aligi Sassu and Birolli [Illustration 39], who were more interested in the expressive possibilities developed by Fauvism and such antecedents of Expressionism with wide social concerns, as Van Gogh and Ensor.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Levi's works evolved from Post-Impressionist influenced emphasis on colour and technique to his increasing interest in the importance of the subject-matter, a position which led to his involvement in Socialist Realism (see p. 265 below).

⁴⁸⁶ Levi had collaborated in a pre-Fascist Liberal journal, La rivoluzione liberale, directed by Piero Gobetti, and founded in Turin the first clandestine anti-Fascist journal with Nello Rosselli, La lotta politica. In Lucania, he worked as a doctor for the peasants. A testimony of this period is the novel Cristo si è fermato a Eboli (Christ Has Stopped at Eboli), published in 1945, a highly influential text on the realists and the debate on popular culture held during the post-war period (see my section 'The debate on Popular Culture', pp. 156 and ff.). From 1943, he lived in Florence and was a member of the Tuscan Committee of National Liberation, in charge of its newspaper, Nazione del popolo. That year, he was again arrested. After the Liberation, he directed the Roman L'Italia libera newspaper and carried on intense political activity in support of the Southern day-labourers. He was elected as an independent in the PCI list for the senate in 1961 and 1968.

Birolli's emblematic work San Zeno (1931) combined Expressionist resources with the influence of the city's Abstract trends to create an innovative image devoid of rhetoric. Sassu, on similar lines, produced figurative paintings coloured in anti-naturalistic reds harmoniously arranged.

For his part, the older and well-connected Mucchi played a decisive role in the development of Milanese painting by connecting French art with the Milan-based painters Sassu, Birolli and others such as Raffaele De Grada and Guttuso, who, together with the poet Salvatore Quasimodo and the sculptor Giacomo Manzù, used to attend meetings at his house.⁴⁸⁸ There, in Guttuso's

⁴⁸⁷ See Pia Vivarelli, 'Personalities and Styles in Figurative art of the thirties' in Emily Braun (ed.), op. cit. (1984).

⁴⁸⁸ Gabriele Mucchi was the son of the painter, filmmaker and Bottai's Ministry official Anton Maria Mucchi. He lived in Berlin from 1925 to 1931, where he organised the First 'Novecento' exhibition, in 1929, and met Dix, Grosz and Käthe Kollwitz, as well as his future partner Jenny Wiegmann, an ex-student of Barlach. In 1931, he moved to Paris and developed a close relationship with Severini and his family, who were friends of his father. He was a member of 'Novecento' who worked in the vein of Carrà and Morandi. The main axis of his early painting included Primitivism and formal research into tonal gradations and the relationship between colours. As De Grada has explained, 'he entered the 'Novecento' movement through the back door, primitivist and intimist; and not through the front door, of Neo-Classicism and rhetoric.' (Raffaele De Grada, 'il tempo lungo di Gabriele Mucchi' in Raffaele De Grada (ed.), Gabriele Mucchi, cento anni, Milan, Silvana editore, 1999, p. 10). This resulted in Romanesque-style paintings of interiors that treated themes of friendship, love and forgiveness in connection with religious iconography, so that they would achieve a social dimension, and, often, a polemical one in confrontation with petty-bourgeois Catholic morality. For example, in 1930, he produced a fresco at Moglia's Il Sudario Chapel on the theme of the Veronique and, in 1933, another one for the outer wall of his father's house in Salò titled Cristo e l'adultera (Christ and the adulterous Woman). This was a provocative painting conceived as a protest against the gossip and criticism he had to bear after he became involved with Wiegmann, who was a married woman. Another painting that consciously struggled against oppressive lifestyles was Le Quattro stagioni, (The Four Seasons, 1944), a commission by the architect Giovanni Romano for the decoration of Missaglia Villa Pirovano. There, Mucchi intended to explore the relationships between life and love, including a Maternity, Due amanti (Two Lovers), Eros nell'atto di spezzare un junco (Eros Cutting Off a Rush), Uno studioso (An Intellectual), Donna nella luna (A Woman in the Moon), I meditatori (The Thinkers), La vecchia (The Old Woman), La danza (The Dance) and I suonatori (The Musicians). However, the village priest intervened and the scenes were eventually covered. Despite the liberating power of Mucchi's images, Guttuso still viewed them as examples of 'poetical intimism' because they did not address conventional political issues. However, Mucchi's focus on private themes of love, according to Guttuso, 'could even be viewed as a wrong approach, but it was always rooted in real emotions.' (Renato

words, 'we discussed painting and anti-Fascism; we looked at books and journals that allowed us to see the forbidden Europe (It was the time of the aggression against Ethiopia and the sanctions);... [we talked] of Diego Rivera and Soviet painting, which had been seen at the Venice Biennale some time ago. We started, albeit with uncertainties, but passionately, a discourse that would later evolve and concretise in the following years.'⁴⁸⁹

1c.III. Rome

In Rome, the main point of reference during the 1930s was the critical art of Scipione [Illustrations 40-42] and Mafai, the founding members of the 'Via Cavour School', or 'Scuola Romana' (School of Rome). These artists only counted on what had been seen in Italy of European art until 1935 and those features of Modernism that they could distill from the work of already established masters such as the Futurists. Scipione's Piazza Navona (1930) [Illustration 40] is a clear example of how, with these resources, Roman School artists produced an art of fragmentary compositions; simplified forms and fast brushstrokes that alternated dark and bright tones to transmit a hallucinatory formal and psychological agitation, an anguished and lucid sense of their personal isolation. Yet, individualism was just the starting point of their artistic programme, as their ultimate scope was to criticise Fascist mass

Guttuso, Catalogue for the Gabriele Mucchi exhibition at 'La colonna' gallery, Milan, 1954, reprinted in *Ibid.*, p. 33).

Upon his return to Italy in 1934, Mucchi became influenced by 'Strapaese' and Sironi, who had just started their polemics against the most reactionary and pro-Nazi wing of the PNF, and were engaged in producing mass political art. The latter had influenced him deeply with his 1933 Manifesto of Mural painting; and had used his influence to grant him commissions, such as a mural titled La madre (The Mother) for the Fifth 1930 'Triennale', the State exhibition of applied arts. See Raffaele De Grada, *op. cit.* (1999), p. 31.

⁴⁸⁹ Renato Guttuso, Catalogue for the Gabriele Mucchi exhibition at 'La colonna' gallery, Milan, 1954, reprinted in Raffaele De Grada (ed.), *op. cit.* (1999), p. 33. See also Renato

rhetoric and the isolation of Italian culture in an unprecedentedly explicit manner.

'Scipione' shows the clearest sense of the course of Italian history by representing the symbols of Rome, including its grand architecture and personalities as caricatures: prisoners of their historic decadence. They had become manipulated and deformed to suit Fascist ends and, therefore, they are depicted as pantomime, as a satire. This is clearly visible in Il cardinale decano (The Dean Cardinal), also from 1930 [Illustration 41]. While, in the case of the 'Sei' in Turin, the critics 'mistook, or simply ignored their subtle protest',⁴⁹⁰ Scipione had a difficult relationship with the official artistic institutions, since his fascination with the decadence of the Rome of the popes lacked the optimism that the regime's critics expected to find in young Italian artists. Il cardinale decano, for example, achieved a great success in the 1930 Venice 'Biennale', but it failed to win the prize for the best young artist because, according to Maraini, Scipione 'could not be presented as an example for younger artists to follow, until they had matured in a more Italian climate.'⁴⁹¹

In the case of Mafai [Illustrations 43-44], he originally employed distorted forms and anti-naturalist colours under the influence of Scipione. The latter's emotive stridencies and clashes of colours, however, are soon substituted in

Guttuso, 'Un marinaio ammanettato, come diventò comunista Renato Guttuso', Vie nuove, 51, 25 December 1949 (b), p. 12.

⁴⁹⁰ See Pia Vivarelli's quotation above. p. 210.

⁴⁹¹ Antonio Maraini, 'Sala 3 salone centrale in 'Catalogue of the XII Venice Biennale', 1930, quoted in Pia Vivarelli, 'Personalities and Styles in Figurative art of the thirties' in Emily Braun (ed.), op. cit. (1989), p. 184.

the former by more subtle and delicate interplays of harmonies and disharmonies. Expressionist influences began to disappear from Mafai's art in the early 1930s, substituted by an increasing tendency towards objectivity manifested in various ways. Sometimes, he sacrifices movement to give an impression of eternity. For D'Agostino, Ragazzo con la palla (Boy with a Ball, 1932,) ⁴⁹² 'is an exemplary work... lacking any narrative element, the basic subject reaches a solemn and ancient dimension.' ⁴⁹³ At other times, like in the case of Fiori secchi sulla mensola (Dried Flowers on the pedestal, 1935) Mafai 'trusts the anti-rhetorical and anti-Classicist message to evocations of the brevity of persons and things.' ⁴⁹⁴ Only around 1941, his confident and objective attitude would weaken for a brief period. That year, anti-Semitic legislation forced him and his partner, the Lithuanian artist Antonietta Raphäel, to move to Genoa, where he painted Trinità dei monti [Illustration 43], a Roman landscape that is an uncommon painting within his production. In it, the shapes lost their focus to express the nostalgia, melancholy and uncertainty of somebody overwhelmed by the situation and forced to abandon his home and friends. ⁴⁹⁵

Mafai rarely evolved into affected, emotional painting nevertheless. Despite his difficult situation as a Jew in 1930s Italy, he was a strong individualist character that sought to cope with the historical uncertainties of his time by means of a rational, serene and self-assured attitude. His painting is

⁴⁹² Displayed at the 1936 Venice 'Biennale' and held at Turin's Municipal Gallery of Modern Art.

⁴⁹³ Laura D'Agostino, on Mafai's Ragazzo con la palla, in Rossana Maggio Serra and Riccardo Passoni, op. cit., p. 232.

⁴⁹⁴ Laura D'Agostino, on Mafai's Fiori secche sulla mensola (Dried Flowers on a Pedestal, 1935) in ibid., p. 232.

characterised by clear lines and volumes; balanced compositions that are open fields for associations and disassociation of the elements of the picture; the careful contrast of masses and voids and humble subject-matter. In this way, for Laura D'Agostino, Mafai 'faces the biggest problems through intimate meditation'⁴⁹⁶

In a 1945 Rinascita article, Mafai's departure from Scipione's use of emotive and affected painting as a vehicle for criticism seemed to Guttuso to mean a more constructive oppositional attitude. This is why, despite his marginal status in the Fascist artistic milieu, 'he was a painter intimately linked to his time and his society.'⁴⁹⁷ Mafai himself had criticised the politically combative Grosz, whom he regarded 'a satirical designer who makes pastiches of Cubism', in the dramatic last years of World War II;⁴⁹⁸ and advised his disciples not to focus on him too much, because Grosz's was not real art, but 'the outcome of disenchantment and precipitate judgements.'⁴⁹⁹

However, in an article published in Rinascita in 1945, he decisively contributed to link Scipione with post-war Communist painting by rescuing him from what he regarded as Grosz's negative psychologism. He explained how Scipione used Expressionist resources to show those aspects of social

⁴⁹⁵ See Laura D'Agostino, on Mafai's Trinità dei monti, in *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁴⁹⁶ Laura D'Agostino, on Mafai's Fiori secche sulla mensola (Dried Flowers on a Pedestal, 1935) in *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁴⁹⁷ Renato Guttuso, 'Pitture di Mario Mafai,' Rinascita, II, n. 11, 1945, p. 253.

◦ ⁴⁹⁸ Mafai as quoted by Renzo Vespignani in Renzo Vespignani, introduction to the catalogue Rosci, Marco (ed.), 37 Premio Suzzara, lavoro e lavoratori nell'arte, premio alla carriera 'Dino Villani', seconda edizione, Renzo Vespignani, a cura di Marco Rosci, Suzzara, Galleria d'arte contemporanea, 21 settembre-26 ottobre 1997, comune di Suzzara and Associazione Galleria del Premio Suzzara, Suzzara, 1997, p. 12.

reality ignored by the cold and celebrative Classicism of the late 'Novecento'. From this point of view, 'Scipione' was not an individualist Expressionist artist, or an anarchising Dadaist. Instead, for Mafai, he had continued the more scientific research of the Rome-based Futurists Balla and Boccioni into the relationship between history, society and pictorial form. It was precisely this that distinguished 'Scipione' from other artistic trends, where 'programmes and schools were invented... and it was not difficult to change one's mind because the grounds were always of a purely intellectual nature.'⁵⁰⁰

Since the early forties, Mafai tended to reduce the figure to elemental shapes, simplifying also the colour range, looking for a synthetic knowledge of the object. But Scipione's critical attitude persisted in artists such as Renzo Vespignani, the leading member of the 'Portonazio' group,⁵⁰¹ with his crude pen and ink works of bombed houses, dead partisans, beggars, prostitutes and street children.

Portonazio is a deprived railway workers area of Rome, near the Termini train station, which was heavily bombed by the Anglo-Americans in 1943. When Vespignani won the Dino Villani award for his whole career, in the 1997 Suzzara Prize,⁵⁰² he tells that 'I always lived in a peripheral area very close to

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid. Mafai had, however, produced certain satirical caricatures of generals, Fascists and priests, such as Grottesco 1 (Grotesque 1, 1941). See Romeo Forni, catalogue of the Arte e impegno civile exhibition, Trieste, AICS and Comune di Trieste, March 1978.

⁵⁰⁰ Mario Mafai, 'Posibilità per un'arte nuova', Rinascita, II, n. 3, 1945, p. 89.

⁵⁰¹ The group was composed by Renzo Vespignani, Marcello Muccini, Buratti and Graziela Urbinatti. See Renzo Vespignani, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰² See my sub-section 'The "realisti"', pp. 299 and ff.

the railways. My love for squalid, miserable and dislocated landscapes is understandable in this light.⁵⁰³

Vespignani is one of the few Italian artists, alongside De Chirico, Sironi, 'Scipione' and Rosai, who departs from Futurists myths of technical progress and treats the question of the modern city in overtly critical terms.⁵⁰⁴ He lacked, however, 'Strapaese' anti-internationalism and was vividly interested in Grosz. This German artist was by then, almost unknown in Italy outside Mafai and Guttuso's circles, which Vespignani frequented at the outset of his career in the early 1940s. He remembers that Mafai had pointed out his similarities with Grosz, even though he had had no contact with German Expressionism at that time (although he knew Ensor).⁵⁰⁵ Thus, 'when I discovered a book on Grosz's drawings in a second-hand stall (there were no Nazis yet)... I had no money, but I stole it. At home, my head was exploding...'⁵⁰⁶ Vespignani rescues Grosz from Mafai's negative interpretation⁵⁰⁷ by viewing the former's work in the same way as the latter did with Scipione,⁵⁰⁸ considering it not merely as 'satire', but as 'cannibalism of a

⁵⁰³ Renzo Vespignani, op. cit., p. 7.

⁵⁰⁴ In this respect, Vespignani shared the same concerns as Neorealist filmmakers such as Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini. *Sciàscià* (1946), for example, tells a story on the loneliness and abandonment of Roman children; or *Paisà*, (1948) six episodes that narrate the northward advance of the allies in Sicily, Naples, Rome, Florence, the Romagna and the Po river region. In the Naples episode, a boy met Joe, an American military policeman and steals his boots while the soldier is drunk. Later, Joe finds the boy, and forces him to take him to his home to tell his parents about his bad behaviour. Then, he finds that the parents died in a bombardment, and the boy lives in the ruins with hundreds of refugees.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁰⁶ Renzo Vespignani, message to Dino Villani that accompanied a painting given to the former as a gift in 1945, quoted by Stelio Villani in the introduction to Rosci, Marco, (ed.), op. cit. (1997), p. 9.

⁵⁰⁷ See Mafai's statement on Grosz on p. 216.

⁵⁰⁸ See Mafai's statement on Scipione on p. 217.

real, corrupted and dislocated reality.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁹ Renzo Vespignani, 'Diario 1943-1946', quoted in Marco Rosci, 'Dal Portonazio a Jamaica la spazzatura del mondo' in Marco Rosci (ed.), op. cit. (1997), p. 12.

2. 'Corrente' and the Road Towards Postcubism

By the end of the 1930s, the isolated critical elements of Italian art tended simultaneously both towards a more homogeneous style and an openly anti-Fascist political outlook. The artists who came together in Corrente aimed to transcend the preceding vitalist and subjective vision with a conscious anti-Fascist commitment that embraced two different aspects. On the one hand, it pre-supposed a rejection of the regime as such. On the other, it aimed to fight the isolationist tendency of Fascism and open Italian art to the wider exchange of ideas. Their common background was the simplicity of the 'Sei's' subject matter, as well as the techniques associated with Roman School: either in the direction of Scipione's aggressive colouring and fragmented compositions; or in Mafai's constructive sense. The governing intention was to reconcile these elements in ambitious works that aimed to address both the epistemological concern of achieving the widest grasp of reality; and the moral concern of moving the viewer to change it.

Romans and Milanese had met together for the first time at the 1935 'Quadriennale', the State exhibition of Italian young contemporary art held in Rome every four years. The same year, they were presented as consolidated artists' groups, in an exhibition organised by the Futurist Libero de Libero at Rome's 'La cometa' gallery with Birolli, Sassu, and the Scuola Romana followers Corrado Cagli and Pirandello.⁵¹⁰ This process culminated in the 'Corrente' ('Current') group, a literary and artistic association that originated

⁵¹⁰ See Serra Zanetti, Paola, Arte astratta e informale in Italia 1946-1963, Bologna, CLUEB, 1995, p. 8

with the Milanese Young Fascist newspaper Vita giovanile (Young Life), founded in January 1938. In October, the publication was renamed Corrente di vita giovanile (Current of young life) and suppressed the Fascist symbols on the cover, becoming Corrente in January 1939. For the first time in Italy, it published texts by Sartre; T.S. Eliot; Federico García Lorca; Ernest Hemingway; Franz Kafka and James Joyce.⁵¹¹

The first 'Corrente' exhibition took place in Milan in March 1939. The next one was held in December with the participation of some members of the Roman group, including, alongside Mafai, younger artists such as Santomaso and Pirandello.⁵¹² When the police closed the newspaper in 1940, some of its contributors began to write in Primato. Others participated in the 'Bergamo Prize' and continued exhibiting in the Milanese 'Galleria Bottega', later renamed 'Galleria della Spiga e Corrente'.⁵¹³

The 'Corrente' artists vindicated international Modern painting in polemics with Fascist nationalism, although they were convinced of the need to overcome the widespread Modernist tendency towards individualism and intellectual deconstruction of reality. Instead they employed a pictorial language rooted in figuration, albeit an expressively distorted figuration, in the hope that their art would have a broad impact and thus set the basis for a national renewal that transcended the artistic dimension as such.

⁵¹¹ See Mario De Micheli, 'Realism and the Post-War Debate' en Emily Braun (ed.), op. cit., 1989, p. 185.

⁵¹² See Guiseppe Marchiori, 'Il fronte nuovo delle arti trent'anni dopo', 'Letteratura', n. 43-45, Florence and Rome, January-June 1960, reprinted in Giuseppe Marchiori, Il fronte nuovo delle arti Giorgio Tacchini editore, Venice, 1978, pp. 12-22.

⁵¹³ See Mario De Micheli, op. cit. (1989), p. 185.

In the beginning, they expressed their social preoccupation by depicting scenes of the suffering of oppressed characters, far away from the solemnity of Sironi's heroes. One of the earliest examples is Sassu's Fucilazione nelle Asturie (Execution in Asturias, 1935) [Illustration 45], a painting that denounced a contemporary event: the repression by colonial troops that followed the Miners' Revolution in that Spanish region that same year.

Sassu would not continue along this line and he became politically more allusive in his following works, yet without losing a strong sense of criticism, in the hope that the detachment of day-to-day political concerns would allow him to undertake a more objective research into the nature of power, repression, exclusion and violence. In 1939, he depicted a hallucinatory scene titled Il prostibolo (The Whorehouse), and, from 1940, his social commitment began to be expressed by means of a personal re-thinking of Biblical and mythical subjects, which he used as metaphors for human passions. His figures are accordingly set in remote past times. This is the case of Athaliah, a 1941 painting of a Bible character [Illustration 46].⁵¹⁴ In it, Sassu employs Scipione's colours and expressive distortions to transmit all the emotional intensity of an episode of exemplary violence: Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, wife of Jehoram and mother of Ahaziah, has the rest of the royal family killed in order to usurp the throne of Judah. Sassu portrays her rapaciously gripping the throne while the crime takes place before her eyes.

⁵¹⁴ See the Second Book of the Kings, chapter 10.

The intellectual and political dilemmas put forward in these paintings show Sassu as one of the first oppositional 1930s artists to reflect on how to intervene in politics without simplifying and lowering the aesthetic result. He shifts from the almost journalistic Fucilazione to the Il prostibolo and Athaliah allegories, which had strong, larger-than-life narrative charge, and possessed meta-historical qualities that continually repeated and renewed themselves in history, even in the present day. This greater depth was achieved, however, at the expense of losing readability because the allusions he employed become too erudite for impact on a mass audience.

In contrast, Guttuso set out to find a compromise between political preoccupation, the enlargement of the audience and the insight into reality that, he thought, should characterise painting.⁵¹⁵ His position is best exemplified by three works made between the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s: Fuga dall'Etna (Flight from Etna, 1938-39); Fucilazione in campagna (Execution in the Countryside, 1939) and Crocifissione (Crucifixion, 1940-1941).

These paintings show Guttuso's attempt to overcome Scipione and Sassu's erudite historical references with the aim of producing a more readable, wider-ranging art. Fuga dall'Etna [Illustration 2] represents the desperate flight of

⁵¹⁵ Guttuso arrived in Milan at the outset of his career, in 1934, and moved to Rome in 1937, in order to overcome the isolation he had experienced in Sicily and the fragmentation into local schools that characterised Italian art of the 1930s. This wide experience also allowed him to play a key role in the organisation of an all-Italy underground network of Communist intellectuals. Earlier, in Palermo, he worked in a cart decoration workshop and also the atelier of the Futurist Pippo Rizzo; and had joined the anti-Fascist opposition at the workshop of Paolo Aiello 1934. When he moved to Rome, his workshop at Melozzo da Forlì square became the meeting point of the group of intellectuals, including Trombadori and Alicata,

the inhabitants of a Sicilian village in the face of the Volcano's eruption, when an overwhelming natural force is unleashed against them. In 1949, Guttuso wrote that it was 'a grand popular painting of plain colours in which the influences of Delacroix and Picasso were mixed. It aimed to return to a painting of composition and content, against... sensitivism and intimism.'⁵¹⁶

However, despite Guttuso's claims for 'an art of composition and content', in comparison with his later work, Fuga dall'Etna employs an agitated composition and a busy aggregation of masses of colours that transmits a sensation of desperation rather than comprehension. Fucilazione in campagna [Illustration 3] represents a further step away from emotive protest, towards post-war Realism. In it, Guttuso avoids any symbolism in order to focus on the execution of García Lorca during the Spanish Civil War. The strident combination of whites and reds still imbue the work with a sense of melodrama; however, the agitation of Fuga dall'Etna, and Sassu's preceding Fucilazione, is reduced to the simplest and most strict composition. The painting is divided in two halves, one with the executioners and the other with the executed, which suggests a clear-cut position with regard to the event depicted.

Thereafter, Guttuso would abandon the emphatic brushstrokes and strident colouring of the 'Scuola romana' for a narrower and more balanced range of plain colours delimited by drawing. The culmination of this process is Crocifissione [Illustration 1], a work made the same year that he joined the

which would eventually form nothing less than the backbone of Togliatti's cultural apparatus from 1944.

Communist Party. Guttuso tells that 'when the painting was shown [in the 1940 Bergamo Prize], the clergy was unleashed against me: My mother was a Catholic; she was seventy years old and she was alone in Sicily. The priest of my village went to trouble her quietness and attempted to weaken her trust in me by waving in front of her a copy of L'osservatore romano where Monsignor Costantini accused me of heresy..., and advocated the intervention of the Holy Office. As a bonus, Farinacci accused me of Bolshevism, Judaism and Internationalism.'⁵¹⁷

In Crocifissione, different narrative moments, perspectives and planes intersect, clash or are superimposed on each other, but a more austere element is introduced by the interplay of horizontal and vertical lines. These signal the main moments and characters that take part in the event. But a whole universe of landscapes and still-lives, which are rather irrelevant for a clear and concise reading of Guttuso's metaphor of human suffering in the hands of evil, act as centrifugal forces that play down the uni-dimensionality of the dramatic narration. The effect is to further rationalise and objectify the feeling of communion with human suffering that Guttuso had striven for in the earlier works. Nevertheless, social protest remains as strong as ever, this time expressed by the widely understandable allusions to the Gospel with the intention of reaching a broad Italian audience familiar with Catholic iconography.

⁵¹⁶ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1949) (b), p. 12.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

In 1949, Guttuso called Crocifissione 'a bastard painting against war with regard to its style and its symbolism.'⁵¹⁸ It was intended to be a popular painting, though Guttuso set himself the task of finding a way out from the equation of populism with either conformist evasion or celebratory nationalism, by incorporating a series of Cubist-influenced technical resources. In so doing, Guttuso sought to draw the attention of the viewer to the constructed nature of the representation and, therefore, to the impossibility of reaching a total knowledge of the subject which can be put at the basis of moral certitude. The English critic Richard Wollheim fixed on Guttuso's employment of Modernist devices to produce a popular realist art when he wrote: 'Guttuso shows that he has assimilated one of the most important and revolutionary lessons of Cubism: the realism of a picture can increase by underlining the reality of the painting.'⁵¹⁹

'Corrente' lacked a common aesthetic line, beyond a generic commitment to figuration and the intention to become a meeting point for those willing to oppose cultural Fascism and who were interested in the latest European developments, until Picasso's Guernica definitively pushed Italian artists on the lines of explicit anti-Fascist political engagement, and artworks that would be, on Mafai's words, 'a moral and a social fact, as well as a propaganda fact.'⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Richard Wollheim, Catalogue of the Guttuso exhibition at the McRoberts and Tunnard Gallery, London, 1960, quoted in Gaetano , (ed.), Renato Guttuso, dipinti, 1945-1965, Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, 7 September-12 October 2000, p.64.

⁵²⁰ Mario Mafai, op. cit. (1945), pp. 89-91.

Guernica had been popularised in Italy by Morlotti, who had visited Paris in 1937, the year of the international exhibition in which this work was on display.⁵²¹ Between December 1942 and January 1943, he and Treccani issued the first theoretical direct antecedent of Italian post-war art, the Primo manifesto di pittori e scultori (First Manifesto of the Painters and Sculptors). There, they declared that earlier undetermined and confused criticism of the regime had now turned into explicit rejection:

'Pain and mystery have been transformed into a will to fight: in the human will resides his character and his destiny... We only acknowledge our love and our hate. Picasso put forward this question in Guernica. We look at Picasso as the most authentic example of those who have invested completely in life and we are not ready to build an academy around him. We recognise in Picasso's attitude the overcoming of the Expressionist artists' intimism and personalism. We see reflected in Picasso's canvases, not his particular fight, but that of his generation. The images of this painter are a provocation and a flag for thousands of men. This is painting not as "revelation", but as "projection" of our will.'⁵²²

The Primo manifesto presented the premises of engaged art without requesting any kind of formal sacrifice to match political criteria. It underlined, however, that the main scope of contemporary painting was social and historic action. For Morlotti and Treccani, Guernica played the role of a

⁵²¹ Also Santomaso was in Paris in 1937. See Raffaele De Grada, 'Corrente, una memoria di mezzo secolo' in Pier Carlo Sandini (ed.), Arte in Italia 1935-1955, Edifir, Florence, 1992, pp. 19-21.

turning point from artists' preceding individualism or, better, a new stage of Modern art in which the contradictions between artistic and political freedom had been blurred. With this painting, Picasso had joined the anti-Fascist cause both as an artist and a citizen. And this not because of any rejection of his 'bourgeois' past as a Modernist, but, rather, as the result of his artistic evolution from Modernist premises.

However, the debate about to what extent art should become involved in political struggle, and to what extent political struggle should determine the way of doing art, soon led to disagreements within 'Corrente'. For De Grada, the group was the embryo of Neorealism or Social Realism, for Modern art had to 'fully complete the circle before reaching a conclusion: Abstract art is a part of the circle; Realism is its end.'⁵²³

Nevertheless, many other members of 'Corrente' were concerned about the negative influence that 'intolerant' exponents of Soviet art could exercise upon the Italian cultural Left. They perceived Socialist Realism as bad art because its technical conservatism was not artistically justified. Rather, it was the result of being a kind of illustration-like art guided by non-artistic parameters. For example, the critic De Micheli warned that Italian artists could not accept any demands to make their work conform to a priori political choices. The politicisation of art should take place according to art's own logic, and not because of its mere subordination to a party programme. In other words: 'a

⁵²² Ernesto Treccani and Ennio Morlotti, 'Primo manifesto di pittori e scultori', 1943, reprinted in Paola Barocchi (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

⁵²³ Quoted in Guido Ballo, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

Verist or Naturalist interpretation of Realism must be avoided, if we do not want to fall into... the mistake of Socialist Realism'.⁵²⁴

⁵²⁴ Mario de Micheli, 'Realismo e poesia', illegally distributed in 1944, published in 'Il 45,' n.1, Milan, February 1946, and reprinted in Enrico Crispolti, Giuseppe Marchiori, Mario De Micheli, Naturalismo e realismo nella prima metà del secolo, Fratelli Fabbri editori, Milan, 1967, pp. 315-317.

II BETWEEN SOCIALIST REALISM AND THE AVANT-GARDE: 1944-1946

1. The influence of Socialist Realism in Italy During the Post-war Period

The main outlines of Socialist Realism were formulated at the First Congress of Soviet Writers held in Moscow in 1934. However, they only arrived in Italy in the wake of World War II. Then, despite the passionate engagement of many intellectuals, a number of contradictions arose between the postulates of international 1940s Communist aesthetics and the traditional practices of the Italian intelligentsia.

In a 1955 Il contemporaneo article, Guttuso recalled when he met Ehrenburg in 1948 and they immediately started to talk about painting:

'He told me what he thought of Soviet painting which, for him, was "detestable" as a whole... I tried to explain our point of view, that is: we agreed that Soviet painting was celebrative and pompous, but we rejected the claim that painting could not represent heroes, speak of great feelings and face great subject-matter... "There are grand ideas, I insisted, and, if there is no good painting behind these, it is not the ideas' fault. It is the individual artists' fault, etc." He shrugged his shoulders and said: "what you're saying has not been proved so far, anyway. Maybe you'll make it. We failed."'”⁵²⁵

⁵²⁵ Renato Guttuso, 'Il coraggio dell'errore', Il contemporaneo, 13 June 1955.

For Stalinist intellectuals, the case of the Soviet Union appeared to prove that Socialism marched unhesitatingly toward its accomplishment. Therefore, if artists wanted to represent reality accurately, they could not be critical, but had to be celebratory. The most they could do was to indicate the means by which society would improve further. Hence, to describe reality in an idealised way, to depict it even more beautifully, was not to falsify it, but to represent it as the point of departure of a future development that should coincide with the party programme.

The Socialist Realist artists would sacrifice a personal understanding of what a better society would be like, because they had already accomplished their act of individual freedom by putting their art at the service of Socialist construction. The true course of history had been already defined by the party. Thus, the most that artists could do was to illustrate a truth that had not been discovered by themselves. The question was, then, how to reconcile the cognitive attitude implicit in 'realism' with such a political choice. In practice, the pre-eminence of the ideological demand could obscure those aspects of actual reality that did not conform to it, thus diminishing the 'realism' of the work, and reproducing a propagandistic version of reality which was merely a construct of party authority; and not the result of artists' original research. In practice, this meant reducing pictorial expression to a technically orthodox figuration which, perhaps, was a valuable tool for Communist politics, but had a limited potential in the field of culture.

In contrast with Socialist Realism, those versions of Italian Modernism, which had survived during the Fascist period, including de Chirico, Morandi and the 'Sei', stressed the value of originality and freedom in art above all other considerations. In this way, they had appeared as politically progressive in contrast with Kitsch Fascist art. After the war, some of the younger representatives of Modern culture asked the Communists to pursue a policy according to these principles. However, in the late 1940s, the political impetus of that kind of art seemed exhausted in Italy, when compared to the more explicit commitment of others such as Guttuso. Moreover, the commercial success of Modern artists during the post-war period, and their overwhelming presence in State-sponsored events, such as the 1948 and 1950 Venice 'Biennale', raised suspicions in the Communists ranks about the 'ideological' role that 'canonical' Modernism was playing within the Capitalist status quo.⁵²⁶

How then, was Socialist Realism received in Italy? The doctrine became a powerful stimulus for intellectuals because it proposed a new art for the masses; it declared the end of Modernist individualism; formulated a new notion of personal responsibility; and intended to democratise the production and consumption of cultural products. Andrei Zhdanov had written that 'Our Soviet literature is tendentious; and we are proud of it, because it aims to free the workers, and the whole of humankind, from Capitalist slavery.'⁵²⁷ After a trip to Russia in 1949, Guttuso declared that, in the Soviet Union, 'culture has completely lost its bourgeois search for novelty at any cost. Instead, it is

⁵²⁶ See my section 'Emilio Sereni and the Cultural Commission', pp. 127 and ff.

directly linked to the people's needs, and their desire for beauty and poetry.'⁵²⁸

Inspired by this project, many artists and writers rushed to praise the struggle of the workers. As Argan writes: 'They understood that the conception of the artist-genius had lost its validity [...] and, in order to re-integrate themselves into society, [...] they should accept the sacrifice of their absolute individualism.'⁵²⁹

Nevertheless, the Soviet's fierce condemnation of the whole avant-garde, and Russian artists' almost complete subordination to the party, were unacceptable to those who still thought bourgeois culture could be revolutionary, because of the incorporation of that critical element based on the notion of personal freedom. For Vittorini:

'In 1941, when the adhesion of our intellectuals to Communism began, Fascism had been in power in Italy for nineteen years. The social disadvantages of Capitalism appeared to them terribly worsened by the absolute abolition of civil and political freedom... Capitalism and Liberalism were not, for them, the same thing... The totalitarian reality in which these men lived brought them to discover the individual greatness of the man who is

⁵²⁷ Zhdanov, Andrei, quoted in Celso Ghini, 'Zdanov nell'anniversario della sua morte', Il calendario del popolo, n. 59, August 1949, p. 463.

⁵²⁸ Renato Guttuso, 'cronache del culturame. Il pittore Guttuso di ritorno dall'URSS. La cultura sovietica al servizio degli uomini', Il calendario del popolo, November 1949.

⁵²⁹ Giulio Carlo Argan, op. cit. (1970), p. 605.

born alone, who dies alone, and who is not free if he cannot count, above all, on individual freedom...'⁵³⁰

Furthermore, by the second half of the 1940s, and despite the struggle against the Nazis and the sanctification of the Soviet intelligentsia in the party press,⁵³¹ the Soviet Union was viewed as a dictatorship by the sector of Italian Left-wing intellectuals more related to Croceanism. According to the art historian Vittorio Strada, these intellectuals regarded Socialist Realism as 'Stalin's invention to keep Soviet and Communist writers in ignorance, and thus make them easier to control.'⁵³² Vittorini reports that many of them 'joined with Communism... only in the realm of history: valuing it according to the historical aspects of the USSR and her associate parties while they fought Fascism. In the realm of ideology, ... they don't think, "Communism isn't what we thought it was". They think, on the contrary, "Communism didn't become what history demanded of it."'⁵³³

Vittorini meant that, with Stalinism, the 'historic possibility that Communism and Liberalism can become the same thing'⁵³⁴ had been lost. In fact, there existed several interpretations of Communism in Italy, and it was the task of

⁵³⁰ Elio Vittorini, op. cit. (1951), pp. 385 and ff.

⁵³¹ For example, Zhdanov was presented in Il calendario del popolo as the man who 'dedicated his entire life to the transformation of the USSR in an advanced industrialised country; to the victory of the collectivisation of the countryside; and the blossoming of science and culture in the country of Socialism.' See Celso Ghini, op. cit., p. 463.

⁵³² Vittorio Strada, Introduction to Giorgio Kraiski (ed.), Rivoluzione e letteratura, in dibattito al I Congresso degli scrittori sovietici, Laterza, Bari, 1967, p XLIII. Marco Romani expressed the ambiguous feeling of certain intellectuals in the face of the Communists' call to Political engagement: 'I still remember my uneasiness when I came into the room of a colleague possessed of a lively and cultural intelligence, and saw a Togliatti's poster behind his desk with the finger pointing out to the viewer. It almost looked like that old image of Uncle Sam saying "I want you", or the punishing god of a certain counter-Reformation iconography.' In Marco Romani, op. cit., p. XVIII.

⁵³³ Elio Vittorini, op. cit., 1951, pp. 385-386.

the party to hold them together by means of a sensitive cultural policy. In Russia, the intellectuals could be 'kept in ignorance', because of the formidable propaganda apparatus. Reprisals against dissidents and even State terrorism accompanied the theory of Socialist Realism. This was unthinkable in Italy. Yet, despite reservations regarding the democratic shortcomings of Stalinism, the Soviet thesis influenced large numbers of artists and intellectuals in the period after the war. These focused their research on overcoming the two problems afflicting the avant-garde from a Socialist point of view: the problem of its source in individual speculation, and the problem of its failure to relate to an uneducated audience.

A major obstacle was that, in its official Russian version, Socialist Realist artists and critics were making too sweeping statements and drawing too rigorous a border between post-war Soviet culture and Western artistic life, including Italian 20th Century art itself. Instead of highlighting the zones in which both could relate to each other, everything that did not resemble 19th Century painting was accused of counter-revolutionary decadentism or petty-bourgeois extravagance.⁵³⁵ For that reason, the partial alignment with official Soviet culture brought the PCI a number of problems, in its relationship with professional artists, that were never completely solved. Unlike in the USSR, Italian Communist politicians could give an opinion, but they could not, nor indeed did they want to, impose it. Instead, despite their repeated calls to order, they devoted themselves to creating a sufficiently broad space to ensure the coexistence and the support of all trends of Italian left-wing culture.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ See my chapter 'Emilio Sereni and the Cultural Commission', pp. 127 and ff.

It was not unusual when Togliatti asserted that 'the defects of our intellectuals are their tendency to isolate themselves. Under the influence of degenerate forms of bourgeois culture, they approach problems in a way incomprehensible to the masses.'⁵³⁶ Nevertheless, if somebody complained, a new statement was often issued, making it clear that 'no Marxist aesthetic has been formulated, neither in Rinascita nor in L'Unità.' Everyone of us just expressed his personal opinion.'⁵³⁷

The Communists stressed that to say 'I like this' was not the same as to say 'you must write or depict this,' but they could not prevent many progressive artists and critics from opposing Socialist Realism as aggressively as their Soviet counterparts opposed modernist culture, even in the party press. For example, Milla, an independent musical critic of the Belfagor Review and L'Unità newspaper, had called the 1949 Congress of Soviet Musicians, presided over by Zhdanov, 'a sad spectacle of incompetence'. Milla regarded Zhdanov himself as 'ignorant in musical matters' because he had condemned Shostakovitch's music as 'formalist'.⁵³⁸ A quarrel started when Togliatti replied from the pages of Rinascita arguing that Milla himself was the ignorant one, and claimed the right of a Leningrad soldier to prefer 'a little gramophone song instead of Shostakovitch's Seventh'.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁶ Palmiro Togliatti, 'Intervento al VI Congresso', in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.143.

⁵³⁷ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1945), p. 254.

⁵³⁸ Milla, Massimo, article for A. Werth, 'Musical Uproar in Moscow,' Turnstyle Press, London, 1949 in 'La rassegna musicale', n° 3, July 1949, p. 247-9, quoted in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.225.

⁵³⁹ Roderigo di Castiglia, 'Direzione ideologica,' Rinascita, VI, n° 10, October 1948 (a), pp. 453-4.

For Togliatti, Zhdanov did not intend to teach music to the musicians, but to give an opinion about contemporary art:

'Together with the voice of the technicians, of the specialists, of the virtuosi, we heard a voice that understands art as the expression of social life and presents artists with the exigencies of that life, calling them to take up the duty that art always took up, when it was truly art, and not an exercise of intellectual decomposition. Who says that artistic problems are only a matter for "competent people" who, in this case, are initiates in the cabalistic jargon that small groups of composers, critics or philosophers have introduced in their circles?'⁵⁴⁰

Milla answered in Rinascita equating Zhdanov's criticism with the Nazi distinction between healthy and degenerate art. He also argued that: 'Today, if we love the arts and esteem the people, we must be honest and tell the people that the arts are difficult and require devotion, humility and sacrifice'.⁵⁴¹

However, in response to Togliatti's arguments, other intellectuals, such as the film critic Luigi Anderlini, were coming to the opposite conclusion from Milla, and reinforced their political commitment as the post-war period went on. Anderlini stressed that the right criterion in art criticism was not the quality, expressive richness or formal originality of the work, but, rather, the breadth of

⁵⁴⁰ Roderigo di Castiglia, 'Orientamento dell'arte', Rinascita, year VII, n° 10, Rome, October, 1949 (a) in Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit. (1979), Vol. 5, p. 523.

⁵⁴¹ Massimo Milla, 'Disorientamento dell'arte', Rinascita, V, n° 11, 1949, pp. 500-501.

its social basis, both from the point of view of the producer and the audience.⁵⁴²

This author distinguished the different aspects of the relationship between the avant-garde and Socialist Realism according to the historico-political complexes to which each was organically attached, in the belief that such complexes determined aesthetic value itself. Furthermore, he asserted that the working class carried the elements of a new and more advanced culture than Modernism, precisely because it was the new revolutionary class: '...When speaking of popular culture, we often understand different and even opposed things: Popular culture can be the "magical", "primitive", "barbaric" culture of the subaltern world... However, it can also be the culture of the masses in a wide sense, or that of the working class.'⁵⁴³

This culture was meant to give a meaningful role to progressive bourgeois intellectuals, in so far as, to quote John Berger, these 'have realised that they can be nothing unless they become the spokesmen of the people.'⁵⁴⁴

However, other Left-wing writers, such as Giuseppe Petronio, disagreed with this thesis, thinking that intellectuals like Anderlini 'let themselves be seduced by the romantic myth of an autonomous culture of the Subaltern class' while,

⁵⁴² See Luigi Anderlini, 'marxismo e cultura popolare', *'Avanti!'*, 12 March 1950, in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), op. cit., La Nuova Italia Editrice, Florence, 1977.

⁵⁴³ Ibid, p. 101.

⁵⁴⁴ John Berger, 'La colonna', quoted in James Hyman, 'A "Pioneer Painter": Renato Guttuso and Realism in Britain,' Catalogue for the Guttuso's Exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, 17 May-7 July 1996, Novecento Editrice and Thames and Hudson, Palermo and London, 1996, p.45. Statements of this kind, of which Togliatti's vindication of the workers' taste in his polemics with Milla is another example, did not quite match with Zhdanov's conception of the artist as an 'engineer of human souls' and suggest a much less monolithic doctrine of Socialist Realism.

in fact, the proletariat was 'imprisoned by misery and ignorance.'⁵⁴⁵ Petronio stressed, instead, the need for an intellectual avant-garde that would take up the task of leading the masses towards Socialism by diffusing modern culture among them.

The discussion as to whether a proletarian culture was possible or desirable went on throughout the late forties and early fifties.⁵⁴⁶ In fact, both arguments seemed to Party officials to be right to a certain extent, and they sought to combat any extremism. Sometimes, they rejected the idea of an autonomous proletarian cultural alternative to modernism, arguing that 'the Communists, who are the driving social force, as well as cultural force, must contribute to the greatness of the nation, not to that of the party.'⁵⁴⁷ On other occasions, however, party figures argued that it would be extremely damaging if workers were to return from an art show believing that Neptune's Fountain, the Baroque landmark of Bologna,⁵⁴⁸ 'should be viewed as the work of reactionaries; and that the artistic revolution begins 'when square rice-harvesters with wooden hips and the face divided into parts like a melon are depicted.'⁵⁴⁹

To reconcile both perspectives, the PCI sought to soften the image of Socialist Realism in Italy by raising the question of its relationship with the avant-garde, not in terms of an unsolved contradiction, but, rather, of an

⁵⁴⁵ In Giuseppe Petronio, 'La creazione di una società solidale' in Carla Pasquinelli (ed), op. cit., p. 106.

⁵⁴⁶ See my section 'The Debate on Popular Culture', pp. 156 and ff.

⁵⁴⁷ Giancarlo Pajetta's speech at the First Congress of Mass Theatre, Forlì, 1951, according to Luciano Leonesi op. cit., (2000).

⁵⁴⁸ Jean Boulogne made Bologna's Neptune's Fountain in 1563.

evolution from modernism to a new kind of Socialist culture that coincided only partially with the Russian one. Guttuso, for example, talked in 1949 of the 'revolutionary character of those works of painting, film and poetry made immediately after the October Revolution'⁵⁵⁰ as a model for his own practice. For Guttuso, however, Modern Russian revolutionary artists were still attached to bourgeois culture and values in many ways, and it was natural that, with Socialism, these evolved towards Socialist Realism, and 'the initial impulse consequently gave way to a period of fierce and thoughtful struggle... Terms are clearer now; the remains of the old world. –Its mawkish and decadent features- have disappeared; and a newer and more simple language is spreading.'⁵⁵¹

In addition, the Communists denounced Cold War propagandistic simplifications that aimed to equate Socialist Realism with repression and regression in art and culture. Togliatti, for instance, underlined that it was a party task to break with 'the myth of a Western culture as opposed to Asian barbarism... The USSR represents not only Europe and science, but it also represents the most advanced part of European science and culture.'⁵⁵² In practice, however, no Soviet writer published a single article in Rinascita during the early post-war period. The journal preferred Louis Aragon's French version, because it was formulated in a manner more congenial for Italian intellectuals, conceiving Communist militancy in a vaguely mythical way, in the form of a new religion of converted cultivated people:

⁵⁴⁹ Roderigo de Castiglia, 'Postilla', Rinascita, V, Rome 1948 (a), p. 470. Togliatti was referring to the paintings showed at the Bologna's Alleanza della cultura exhibition of 1948.

⁵⁵⁰ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1949) (d), pp. 1-2.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

'My party has given me back the epic sense
My party has given me the colours of France
My party, my party thanks to your lessons
For since then everything reaches me in songs
Anger and love, joy and suffering.'⁵⁵³

Aragon's 'party lyricism', as Alberto Moravia called it,⁵⁵⁴ claimed to be the inheritor of the progressive French cultural tradition, incarnated in Zola, Victor Hugo or Rimbaud, and to derive his accommodation with the masses from an individual process of intellectual development.⁵⁵⁵ The Frenchman explained his position in Rinascita as follows:

'I have an idea of the art of the novel that is not compatible with the imitation of literary models... The Realist looks for his models in life and not in books... Very many people, particularly writers, confuse Realism and Naturalist painting... They do not believe, as I do, that Realism is first of all a point of view arising from the spirit of the writer... If this worldview is Socialist, it is completely natural to describe the Realism of the artists I am mentioning as "Socialist Realism"... It is very significant that Socialist Realism in Russia honoured the works of Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, Gogol, and Pushkin. In France, it comes back to other masters. That is why it is understandable when I say

⁵⁵² Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit. (1950), p.14.

⁵⁵³ Louis Aragon, 'Du poète à son parti,' Rinascita, II, n° 1, January 1945, p. 17. Translation by Bernard A. Evans.

⁵⁵⁴ Alberto Moravia, 'Il cuculo comunista,' 'Il mondo,' 4 February 1950, in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.52.

that one only arrives at Socialist Realism on the national road... Socialist Realism will find its universal values in each country only if it penetrates the roots of particular, national realities.'⁵⁵⁶

In reality, this was not different from what Stalin had said in 1925 in his speech On the Political Duties of the University in the Eastern Nations: 'We build a Proletarian culture. This is perfectly true. However, it is also true that Proletarian culture, Socialist in its content, takes different forms and modes of expression in the different peoples attracted to the Socialist unification...'⁵⁵⁷

Likewise, in the late 1940s, an artwork made under Aragon's premises could belong either to a Soviet painter or to Picasso. He was looking for a wide definition of the term that could reconcile both perspectives, arguing that 'the systematic rejection of everything that is not figuration, delivered with academic authority, diminishes Realism...'⁵⁵⁸

The example of Picasso was paradigmatic because both his Communist commitment and his Modernism were, at that point, beyond dispute. Although his Realism was different from that of Balzac or Tolstoi, Aragon argued, he should not be excluded from the Proletarian pantheon of fame. On the contrary, in the light of his work it was necessary both to broaden the meaning

⁵⁵⁵ See Louis Aragon, 'Realismo Socialista e realismo francese,' Rinascita, VII, n° 2, pp. 483-485, 1949.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Josef Vasilievich Stalin, 'Socineniya', Vol. III, Moscow 1949, p. 138, quoted in Vittorio Strada, op. cit., p. XLI.

⁵⁵⁸ Louis Aragon, Preface to Roger Garaudy, Hacia un realismo sin fronteras: Picasso, Kafka, St. John Perse, Lautaro, Buenos Aires, 1964, p.11.

of Socialist Realism in the present as well as to discover new aspects in Picasso that could relate him to the Realism of the past.⁵⁵⁹

Another Frenchman, the painter André Fougeron, wrote in Rinascita in 1947 that 'to develop the new Realism requires new technical means. I believe in the superiority of Modern language, which takes into consideration the technical revolution that has occurred in painting, for example Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism [...]. These forms are needed to call the people to action and to celebrate their fight and their victory.'⁵⁶⁰ Nevertheless, PCI representatives stressed that the need to maintain the relationship with a mass audience had to set limits to these technical advances. In the case of intellectuals, it was widely agreed that culture had a duty regarding the working class. However, many viewed these calls to order as grounded on dogmatic and retrograde idealisations of the average person while, for them, the core of the Communist cultural programme should consist in the transformation of that 'average' person into a subtle and highly differentiated one, as well as in the re-composition of the balance between individual and collective experience. This left a feeling among many Modernist intellectuals - who were nevertheless close to the Communists in other fields that, in the sphere of art, quality was being sacrificed for quantity.

The composite character of Italian Communist culture became more evident after 1947, with the outbreak of the Cold War. When Sereni took charge of the Cultural Commission that year, newer, young intellectuals came to the

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ André Fougeron, 'Un saluto di Fougeron,' Rinascita, IV, n° 6, 1947, pp. 164-165.

forefront. Leading figures of Communist culture during the preceding period, such as Guttuso and Trombadori, remained within the PCI ranks, but the political commitment of personalities such as Vittorini weakened. He abandoned the PCI in 1951, although he continued to gravitate around the Left-wing bloc. Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to consider this as the direct outcome of authoritarian political pressures. In practice, according to Rossanda, 'Apart from Marx's portrait, which could be seen everywhere, the PCI they never talked about Marx.'⁵⁶¹ In reality, Vittorini left, not because he stood for cultural freedom from politics, but because he was proposing an alternative cultural politics that the Party could not accept. The Communists could renounce a policy of forcing intellectuals in a given cultural direction. They could be ideologically permissive. But, in the controversy over Socialist Realism, they could not issue an official aesthetic based in Modernism, as this would break the party and jeopardise its system of alliances.⁵⁶² Whatever might have been the case in artistic debates, to abandon the emphasis on the need for art to be comprehensible to a mass audience would have been politically unacceptable to the PCI's broader constituency.

In the second half of the 1950s, however, Socialist Realism ceased to be a consolidated cultural option within the PCI and, for the first time, the Italian Communists began to publicly recognise that the criticism of Soviet cultural policy, for its repression of freedom and the overwhelming domination of

⁵⁶¹ 'Quoted in Marco Fini, 'La polemica Togliatti-Vittorini (interview with Rosanna Rossanda) 'L'Europeo,' 6 March 1975, in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.126.

⁵⁶² When Vittorini quitted, Togliatti argued that he 'came with us because he thought that we were Liberals. However, we are Communists.' Roderigo de Castiglia, 'Vittorini se n'è giuto. E soli li ha lasciato...', *Rinascita*, year VIII, n° 8, August 1951, in Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit. (1979), Vol. V, p. 616.

politics over culture, was certainly justified. The problem of putting advanced avant-garde research under a new light, taking into account the new cultural values produced by the October Revolution, had to be faced. But, in general, what Soviet Socialist Realism had done was to brutally get rid of those who raised such questions, and not to solve them.

Nevertheless, in Italy, the Communists continued intervening in art matters, stressing that the problem of the re-appropriation of aesthetic taste by the masses, and the problem of democratising art, that the Russian debates foregrounded, did indeed have to be addressed by artists; and that a solution was possible without betraying basic principles. On Guttuso's words, artists' involvement with Communism:

'should not be the result of passive obedience to party directives. It should be the result of a clearer awareness of the historic situation. But why don't we use everything that is attached to reality, including Zhdanov and Fadeev, rejecting what has to be rejected and saving what is positive in them, instead of giving way to total liquidation? Why should rejection of bureaucracy necessarily mean total rejection...; [why] hinder objective and constructive criticism; and fail to distinguish between truth and falsehood?

We think that modern art should recognise important subject-matter and express it artistically ...; We have pointed out that Realism can be inspired by history, and not only by everyday life... If somebody is telling us to engage in self-criticism and, then, wants us to enter into some relaxed cultural climate

[i.e. 'commercial Modernism'], this would mean telling the Communists to abandon modern art to decadence, which would be, for us, like committing a crime.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶³ Renato Guttuso, 'Rinnovare o ristorare', Il contemporaneo, 16 June 1956, p. 6.

2. Picasso's Legacy

In the 1930s, Italian isolationism had detached younger artists from the regime and signalled the exhaustion of the project of intellectual Fascism that had earlier gained Mussolini a wide support. For those young artists, every novelty from Europe was welcome, but, perhaps, as in the case of Scipione, Sassu, Guttuso, Vespignani and others, they thought that Expressionism could reflect best the horror of living in a dictatorship with no short-term perspective of change.

Expressionism had been valued by Italian Left-wing artists and critics on the basis of being 'an art of opposition'.⁵⁶⁴ After the war, however, confidence in social and personal reconstruction returned, and Cubism became the main subject of discussion, while Expressionism began to be perceived as too attached to individualism, as an immediate retreat to personal feelings which was not adequate to the times.

From an Italian point of view, it was widely believed that the significance of the Cubist revolution was the critique and eventual dissolution of every established notion of knowledge and morals by means of the exposure of its constructed character. Another characteristic of Cubism had been its tendency to overcome psychological or symbolist approaches to reality and instead to embark on a more objective analytical approach. Hence, Italian artists and critics tended to regard Cubism as a rationalist, universalist, anti-

⁵⁶⁴ See Mario De Micheli, *op. cit.* (1996), p. 70.

ideological and revolutionary art. Mucchi explained to Il calendario del popolo readers that 'Cubism was strongly opposed to established taste; and, by putting reason above sensibility, it evolved towards a new Classicism.'⁵⁶⁵

In terms of the practicalities of production and market, however, Cubism exhibited tangible weaknesses from a Left-wing perspective, as it was practised and appreciated by small groups of highly cultured individuals and distributed as a commodity for bourgeois consumers.⁵⁶⁶ Part of the reason for Guernica's importance was that Picasso seemed to break with the channels of distribution of his early work, and to produce, rather than a canvas, a mural for a public space. Nonetheless, although the subject-matter of Guernica was a concrete political event, the way in which it was represented seemed to detach it from concrete political struggle. Its anti-Fascism remained allusive, and some political revolutionaries thought it too difficult to read for the workers.

Another characteristic of Guernica is that Picasso transforms his earlier method of intellectual detachment, typical of the first Cubist experiences, and becomes fully implicated in the event narrated. Picasso's Cubism had been developed in the wake of the emotional humanitarianism and solidarity with the deprived, which was typical of his earlier blue and pink periods. This moral commitment is not Modernist, but, is rather characteristic of the 19th Century adherence to the project of the 'painting of modern life'. The

⁵⁶⁵ Gabriele Mucchi, op. cit. (1949) (b), p. 525.

⁵⁶⁶ See Francis Francina, 'The dealer contract as contradictory sign', 'Realism and Ideology: An Introduction to Semiotics and Cubism', in Charles Harrison, Francis Francina, Gill Perry,

difference with Picasso is that such commitment is not expressed in the representational conventions of 19th Century painting, but, rather, is a product of the crisis of 19th Century ideas of scientific progress and objectivity.⁵⁶⁷

Later political developments of the 1930s, including the proclamation of the Spanish Republic in 1933 seemed to bring new social hopes and expectations to Picasso. One of the most striking features of his mid 1930s minotaurs and bullfights is their vitality, earthiness, and their attachment to national and popular iconography. Then, the Civil War broke out. Picasso's social commitment took the form of exacerbated violence. In Dreams and Lies of Franco, he unleashes all his imagination to produce extremely aggressive forms against Franco. These etchings are the outcome of hate and, in this way, Picasso detached himself from all his earlier work in a very significant manner, to the extent that Dreams and Lies of Franco seems to operate with a different understanding of what art is. Nevertheless, this work set Picasso new tasks as an artist and, quite surely, Guernica could not have existed without it. Achille Bonito Oliva has underlined Guernica's novelty as:

'The horror at the violent events prevails over the experimental attitude that is typical of the artists of the great historical avant-garde. [After Guernica,] artists do not regard themselves as members of a cultural movement any more but, rather, see themselves as members of an enlarged humanity that

Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction. The Early Twentieth Century, Yale University Press and The Open University, New Haven and London, 1993, pp. 175-178.

⁵⁶⁷ See Mario De Micheli, op. cit. (1996).

demands a suitable response to an event that will never belong to the past, but, instead, is a continuous menace.⁵⁶⁸

Bonito Oliva has described Guernica as an example of 'Socialist Cubism'.⁵⁶⁹ In it, the aim at popularity, and its conception of a clear political task, was combined with Cubism's original polemical attitude against petit-bourgeois thinking since, as Ajello asserts, 'the bourgeois of little culture and without political education violently rejected everything that was a product new to the world.'⁵⁷⁰ For these reasons, Picasso was celebrated in Italy as 'the banner bearer of a dialectical and revolutionary culture, always aligned...with the democratic and popular forces.'⁵⁷¹

In the words of Oliva, in Guernica, 'as in advertising, the image at the service of the message prevails over the design.'⁵⁷² However, this painting seems to pose the question of anti-Fascist engagement, raised in Dreams and Lies of Franco, under the light of a preceding commitment to objectivity and analysis. It certainly intended to move the audience to action in the face of the Fascist rebellion in Spain, but, in the sketches, Picasso progressively got rid of too explicit political symbols, such as the Communist clenched fist of the defeated warrior on the lower side, so that, in the final version, the event told reaches a level of abstraction that seeks to transcend the mere empirical data to reflect

⁵⁶⁸ Achille Bonito Oliva, 'Come Picasso realizzò la diretta', La repubblica, 26 April 2000, p. 45.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Nello Ajello, op. cit., p. 55.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p.42-43.

⁵⁷² Achille Bonito Oliva, op. cit., p. 45.

an eternal situation.⁵⁷³ Guernica means a general recapitulation of the developmental features of Modernism, from the point of view of the engaged content of the work of art, which are typical of Picasso's early work; and its innovative features with regard to the form that characterise analytic Cubism. Argan wrote in 1968 that 'Picasso is the artist who plays the role of a great classicist, he is a standard-bearer of high art, and still manages to make a masterpiece of historical painting.'⁵⁷⁴ For his part, Mario De Micheli added in 1996 that, with this painting:

'The period of the avant-garde is positively concluded. [Guernica] means an incomparable re-capitulation of the formal and continuistic principles [of Modern art]. From then on, the questions that artists have to face cannot be put in mere avant-gardist terms any more. Instead, these questions necessarily tend to the overcoming [of the avant-garde].'⁵⁷⁵

Morlotti and Treccani had made an interpretation on similar lines, earlier in 1944, where the aim to move forward from Picasso also became explicit. In their Secondo manifesto di pittori e scultori (Second Manifesto of Painters and Sculptors), also called Oltre Guernica (Beyond Guernica), they made it clear that Guernica was, for them, a frontier painting. It was only the starting point of the new art that they intended to promote. They wrote that 'we find in Guernica the first "signals" of a class that pushes the old Society to destruction (revenge and revolution)... '[However], 'our contribution to

⁵⁷³ For iconographies of Guernica, see Eberhardt Frisch, Guernica by Picasso, Bucknell University Press, London and Toronto, 1988; and Hershell B. Chipp, Picasso's Guernica, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988.

⁵⁷⁴ Giulio Carlo Argan, op. cit., 1968, p. 29.

Picasso... consists in proceeding beyond the rupture that his work created...

[We are] workers of the arts in the Socialist factory of the future.'⁵⁷⁶

The direct consequence was the belief in the need for art to become even more closely articulated with a political doctrine than in the case of Guernica. In 1944, Guttuso had reflected on the terms of the relationship between Modern artists and Socialism: The main characteristic of art under Capitalism was autonomy that is: formal freedom. However, 'on second thoughts, what a very impoverished freedom! The freedom to place two eyes on the same side of the face, the freedom to paint a green horse or a blue nude.'⁵⁷⁷ Artists, for Guttuso, had been implicated in Fascism in two main ways: by becoming propaganda makers, but also by considering that they had nothing to do with Fascism, and retreating to intimate subject-matter and 'pure research' into painterly forms. Guttuso viewed both of these ways as social and historically regressive. Nevertheless, unlike cultural Fascism, Guernica had shown that 'decadent' Modernism contained the possibility of its overcoming within itself. Hence, Italian anti-Fascist artists in the 1930s 'had to defend Morandi's bottles, even though we were engaged in other questions... Younger artists, therefore, approached a culture that did not satisfy them but was still the expression of their society and kept elements for revolt and change which could be used, in the future, for a real renewal'⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁵ De Micheli, Mario, Le avanguardie artistiche del Novecento, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1996, p. 231.

⁵⁷⁶ Ennio Morlotti, and Ernesto Treccani, op. cit. (1944), p.42.

⁵⁷⁷ Renato Guttuso, 'Crisi di rinnovamento', Cosmopolita, 30 December 1944.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

Regarded in the light of Picasso's Modernist background, he was not, for Guttuso, 'the painter of the future.'⁵⁷⁹ However, he was a cornerstone of the Socialist renewal of the arts that Guttuso had in mind. He warned about the simplistic, politically dangerous and authoritarian substitution of Picassianism for still almost non-existent examples of Socialist culture, arguing that 'Lenin teaches us that Proletarian culture is not born out of nothing... We combat commonplaces that do not solve anything... Meanwhile, we denounce a crisis which is deeply rooted inside us; and feel that our dissatisfaction with a culture that opposed cultural duties and the defence of principles is not enough... Art cannot be a passive spectator of the development of forces fighting for the transformation of the world. This is what we have learnt so far. It is not too much, but we feel an advantage regarding those who have not learnt it.'⁵⁸⁰

Interpretations on similar lines succeeded during the early post-war years. In 1946, Morlotti outlined the historic dynamics of Modernism towards Guernica and Socialist art in an 'Open Letter to Picasso' published in the Numero journal:

'Fauvism and Cubism developed from the starting point of taking the object at the basis for representing an inner reality. These movements represent the two opposites in the search for equilibrium between subject and object.

Fauvism entails the search for an emotive personal state under the

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

suggestion of colour... while Cubism consists of the search for the structural aspect... With Guernica, subject and object, nature and man are no longer two contradictory notions, but become identified in an ultimate collective reality... In Guernica, the fusion of the individual with Society takes place with the relative denial of all the differences that arise in the artist's individual perspective... The road to collective art is open. This is the lesson of Guernica...⁵⁸¹

Morlotti attempted a dialectical reading of the history of 20th Century art up to World War II, conceived as the arena for a long struggle of Modernism against academicism. For him, no clear winner had come out from such confrontation: 'The deification of pure contingency and pure freewill', which had characterised Modern art, 'led to the suicide of individualism'; [whereas] the deification of the eternal led to the ossified death of academia...⁵⁸²

However, Morlotti asserted that a synthesis which contained features of both contenders had recently been achieved:

'We are in a new era whose first contribution in painting is Guernica. It is only the first page, but a decisive one. The myth of the "individual", of "nature", of "reason", is overcome. A new iconography is initiated: the iconography of a new reality. In the pursuit of the new man, Cubism emerged from its adolescence; it has come out onto the stage of life; it has evolved from scientific and sentimental experience. Knife, lamp, window and bull are no longer just a knife, a lamp, a window and a bull, but images, stimuli. These

⁵⁸¹ Ennio Morlotti, 'Lettera a Picasso', 'Numero', year II, n. 1, January-February 1946, reprinted in Paola Barocchi (ed.), op. cit., p. 40.

objects do not pass through the eyes, the brain, the heart of an individual, Rather, they are the will, truth and reality of a society: they are the common meeting point.⁵⁸³

For Morlotti also, the painting was the starting point of an evolution towards a simultaneously popular, politically engaged and aesthetically modern art that would be expression of a sort of cultural common-sense, or irrational feeling of 'truth, will and reality' shared by everybody.

However, there was still a difference between Guernica and works produced by artists such as Morlotti who, two years earlier, had taken distance from Picasso by declaring himself not an artist, but rather a 'worker of the arts in the Socialist factory of the future.'⁵⁸⁴ More voices claimed that, in many ways, Guernica still belonged to the past, to an artistic age of broadly understood anti-Fascism that had to be superseded to meet the new historical conditions of the post-war period of construction of Socialism. This painting had been an unquestionable positive artistic novelty in the late 1930s. Yet, Argan argued, that the situation in the wake of World War II demanded artists provide and take up even more concrete political tasks:

'In Guernica, Picasso endowed the abstract forms with a human content... Furthermore, this drama does not take place in a fixed space or time, but

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Ennio Morlotti and Ernesto Treccani, op. cit. (1944), p.42.

repeats itself, with the same violence, every time someone stands before it and is attracted by the danger of the void, shaken by that world in explosion...

Picasso's painting is still metaphysics: its intention consists in isolating, with pure drawing, an idea that is not the idea of anything but... the distinctive sign of consciousness. In so doing, he delineates, outside any possible reality, the "form" of the human spirit.⁵⁸⁵

Argan declared that Guernica had opened new ways for painting, however, it could not be reduced to a formula: 'the Italian artists know perfectly well that, nowadays, a painting which does not go beyond Picasso cannot exist. [Their task consists in] constructing a moral life.'⁵⁸⁶

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, the Communist artists' discourse on Picasso and Modern culture tended to shift from a discourse of evolution to open criticism of those who had not already 'evolved'. Mucchi, for example, wrote in Il calendario del popolo in 1950 that:

'Guernica was not really a popular work of art. It exercised a strong influence within intellectual avant-garde circles... But [the workers] defended Picasso and Guernica only because Guernica was anti-Fascist... Picasso's art is born out of a story that is finishing now: the cycle of capitalist wars and the contradictions of capitalism. He depicts this story with his own contradictions,

⁵⁸⁵ Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Pittura italiana e cultura europea', 1946, reprinted in Paola Barocchi, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

his own monsters, and his intellectualism. However, we are striving for a new civilisation and a new art. Picasso is still our teacher in many things, but we would be lost if we only rely on his art. In this sense, Picasso does not help us. Instead, he represents an obstacle'⁵⁸⁷

If something of Picasso could be kept, it was that work which he made for explicit political purposes, when 'he took a clear position on the side of the humble and against the powerful; and for peace lovers against the bellicose,'⁵⁸⁸ such as the Dove of Peace made for the Partisans for Peace. Another work, Massacre in Korea (1951) seem to be a proof that Picasso himself endorsed this view in the early 1950s. In it, the resemblance to Goya's Fusilamientos ensures an easy reading; formal research is reduced to the minimum and stylistic deformations are only used to emphasize the message and reflect the use of technology against defenceless people.

This was not, however, the only interpretation of Picasso that circulated in the post-war Italian artistic milieu. Guernica's determined social protest favoured the image of an engaged Picasso, fully immersed in the events of the world, while its formal novelty was also seen to exemplify a scientific, rationalist Picasso, who critically distanced himself from these events. The passage from analytic Cubism could be viewed as the result of the evolution of Modern art towards political engagement. Yet, Italian art had followed a different course from the arts produced in France during the inter-war period. Then, in the 1940s, after a long period of relative isolation from Western European

⁵⁸⁷ Gabriele Mucchi, op. cit. (1949) (c), p. 541.

developments, Italian artists simultaneously received various interpretations of Cubism, as well as vast amount of information on modern art in general. A number of exhibitions, as well as the possibility of travel to the main European artistic centres, enormously widened the range of expressive possibilities at the disposal of Italian artists. For example, in the first post-war Venice Biennale of 1948, there were one-man shows by Picasso, Braque, De Chirico, Kokoscka, Chagall, Rouault, Schiele, Ensor, Delvaux and Kandinsky.⁵⁸⁹ In addition, Peggy Guggenheim exhibited her collection, which included works by Giacometti, Calder, Picasso, Kandinsky, Man Ray, Dix, Dalí, Ernst, Malevitch and Mondrian.⁵⁹⁰

Argan, Morlotti, Treccani and Guttuso had promoted a reading of Cubism as the starting point of a new Socialist period in the arts and for humanity in general, while Venturi, to the contrary, emphasised Cubism's epistemologically and ethically neutral attitude. The latter argued, in respect to Picasso, that he did not promote any politics or worldview, but presented the viewer with open fields for the working of the mind and the eye:

'The dissection of objects into parts and their Cubist arrangement are attempts to suggest view of every part of the object. The result is, of course,

⁵⁸⁸ L'arte é un impegno serio... o un giro senza regole', Il calendario del popolo, special issue, January 1951, p 30.

⁵⁸⁹ See Roberto Reborio, 'La Biennale di Venezia, la sagra dei premi', 24 ore, Milan, 19 June 1948.

⁵⁹⁰ See Ferrante Azzali, 'La mecenate signora Guggenheim', L'illustrazione italiana, Milan, 1 August 1948.

that the perception of the object is missing, and an interpretation by the imagination becomes necessary.⁵⁹¹

Venturi wrote these lines in 1946, just after his return from exile in the United States. Nevertheless, by 1948, Picasso was in the Venice Biennale with a catalogue written by his comrade Guttuso.⁵⁹² He was immediately regarded by public opinion as the head of the Communist group of artists, despite the fact that half of the works exhibited were dated before World War I and none of them was politically explicit.⁵⁹³ Braque, in turn, was awarded the first prize. When commenting on the 'Biennale', Venturi was, this time, distinguishing Cubism, in the sense of Braque's more genuinely artistic concern about technical development, from revolutionary Picassismo, arguing that 'Picasso is a gifted adventurer, [whereas] Braque is a quiet French bourgeois who has worked all his life to develop himself as an artist.'⁵⁹⁴

Leonardo Borghese wrote in Il corriere della sera, that Italian painting was 'divided in two'⁵⁹⁵ as a consequence of these two interpretations of Cubism offered in the 'Biennale'. However, the organisers attempted to avoid open polemics by declaring Picasso out of competition, as if he was a retired master. Such measures did nothing but further muddy the waters. De Grada reported it as a political move of the government, arguing that Braque's award

⁵⁹¹ Lionello Venturi, 'Considerazioni sull'arte astratta', 'Domus', XVIII, January 1946, p. 34-35, reprinted in *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁵⁹² Renato Guttuso, 'Sala L Pablo Picasso, mostra personale', Catalogo XXIV esposizione arti visive, Biennale di Venezia, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 189-190.

⁵⁹³ See *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

⁵⁹⁴ Lionello Venturi, 'Terribile confessore Pablo Picasso ci parla dei mali del nostro tempo', La gazzeta, Livorno, 16 September 1948.

⁵⁹⁵ Leonardo Borghese, 'Divisa in due la pittura italiana', Corriere della sera, Mila, 6 June 1949.

to the detriment of Picasso meant that the anti-Communist 'party of pure painting' had been the winner of the 'Biennale'.⁵⁹⁶

For Mucchi, Venturi's was an erroneous interpretation of Cubism. In his view, Picasso was not merely producing rhetoric at the service of his political adventures, but he was continuing his Cubist scientific programme of achieving a deeper knowledge of collective reality than that provided by conventional painting. Mucchi argued that such commitment meant that the artist had to reflect the contemporary progressive social forces in motion and evolve according to these. Accordingly, Pre-war Cubist formal deconstruction was a kind of art typical of bourgeois society and the oppositional avant-garde. But, in a period of mass democracy, Cubist realism meant a commitment with a broad constituency and its political objectives. If artists and critics were to view Cubism as a fixed 'aesthetics'; and not within a historic dynamics, they risked producing a new academy: For Mucchi, Guttuso was the Italian who had understood Picasso's lesson best. '[He] had the merit of not letting himself be enticed by intellectual Abstract art, and did not fall into easy formal solutions.'⁵⁹⁷

Similarly, in the introduction to the Picasso catalogue of the 1948 Venice 'Biennale', Guttuso also argued that 'the Cubist lesson... received uncritically... has led to modern Formalism: to roads that, according to me, and according to Picasso too, I think, are the false paths of painting...'⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Gabriele Mucchi, op. cit. (1949) (a), p.8.

⁵⁹⁸ See Renato Guttuso, 'Sala L Pablo Picasso, mostra personale', Catalogo XXIV esposizione arti visive, Biennale di Venezia, op. cit., pp. 189-190.

While Venturi was asserting that Cubism had no ultimate political programme,⁵⁹⁹ for Guttuso:

‘Picasso’s work demonstrates the main objective of art, which consists in advancing a debate that is not between the abstract and the concrete, or between the figurative and the non-figurative, or between Formalism and Naturalism, but between human and anti-human values, between “good” and “evil”.’⁶⁰⁰

In the line of preceding interpretations of Guernica, Guttuso outlined a history of modernism that began with Cézanne’s polemics against Impressionism, after the invention of photography: a mechanical means which could represent the physical aspect of reality better than painting. This forced artists to focus on ways of looking, rather than on reality itself. However, Guttuso held that pure form -beautiful, autonomous and expressive by itself- could not become art’s only subject matter without falling into unacceptable reductionism. Instead, the synthesis to reach was that style of painting which, after the experience of Abstraction, Cubism and Expressionism, returned to Realism conceived as the expression of the historical manner in which man lives his reality and makes of it the arena of his activity. According to Guttuso, only Picasso had reached such a synthesis so far, ‘being also the only Modern painter who has maintained in his painting the objectives of Ancient painting... Painting is not only form or content, not only fashion, not only

⁵⁹⁹ Lionello Venturi, op. cit. (1946), p. 44.

taste, not only order, construction, or merely drawing, or colour, but all these at the same time.⁶⁰¹

Venturi championed an interpretation whose axis was disinterested technical quality, as opposed to approaches seeking to articulate the art phenomenon within a given social and historic context. The latter idea, for him, was the idea of a politician, and not of a specialist of art who is only concerned with the visual properties of an image.

Venturi remained convinced that political considerations in art 'can only lead to the disintegration of artistic freedom and spontaneity'.⁶⁰² However, Argan objected to this, arguing that a socially engaged art, as long as it was contemporary art, was not a question of choice, but an historic need. He remarked that, to be European, meant to acknowledge that the Europe which had produced 'critical' and 'autonomous' Modernism had tragically ceased to exist after Fascism and the war had shown its weaknesses in opposing violence and dictatorial political regimes which consciously, and in practice, had intended to erase Modern cultural values from history by means of deportations, executions and concentration camps. For Argan, those who refused to take up a clear political position against Fascism, in accordance with intellectual tenets of that sort, were just building dialectical trenches to protect themselves from the collapse of their scheme of values:

⁶⁰⁰ Renato Guttuso, 'Sala L Pablo Picasso, mostra personale', Catalogo XXIV esposizione arti visive, Biennale di Venezia, op. cit., p. 190.

⁶⁰¹ Renato Guttuso, 'Osservazioni generali a proposito della XXIV biennale,' Rinascita, V, n° 6, 1948, (c) p. 228.

⁶⁰² Venturi, Lionello, 'Otto pittori italiani', Rome, 1952 in De Micheli, quoted in Mario De Micheli, op. cit. (1989), p. 287.

'They are not ignorant of the tragic contradictions of the culture they defend, but their erudition ensures them a passage between the poles of these contradictions. They want that culture to survive because it provides a certain security of thought... [They are] happy to discover that this dangerous culture did not harm, or destroy, their "personality". In their "petite sensation", they managed to find the irrefutable proof of their existence'⁶⁰³

In the debates on Picasso during the post-war period, it seemed as though the participants in the debate were trying to impose a priori schemes on the artworks, be these exigencies of intellectual sophistication or claims for the democratisation of the arts, instead of judging the artists by the extent to which, in practice, they had managed to reconcile the two issues at stake.⁶⁰⁴ This is why Guttuso complained that 'Italian contemporary criticism does not follow the artists in their efforts, but pretends to direct them,'⁶⁰⁵ while the art historian Roberto Longhi noted that, in Italy, they 'did not judge artists but trends.'⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰³Giulio Carlo Argan, op. cit. (1946), p. 57.

⁶⁰⁴ See Roberto Longhi, 'Guttuso a New York', letter to Guttuso of 20 January 1958, Florence, reprinted in Gaetano Bordonaro (ed.), op. cit., p.99.

⁶⁰⁵Renato Guttuso, 'Alcuni artisti italiani e stranieri,' Rinascita, V, n° 7, 1948 (a), p. 274.

⁶⁰⁶ Roberto Longhi, op. cit., p. 100.

3. The 'Nuova secessione italiana' and the 'Fronte nuovo delle arti'

After the war, ephemeral post-war art journals, such as Vittorini's Il politecnico, Il'45, Pittura and Numero, continued the 'Corrente' debates and stressed artists' social responsibility in a variety of ways, ranging from a generic reflection on the human condition to militancy in the PCI. The 'Arte contro la barbarie' ('Art Against Barbarism') exhibition, organised in Rome by L'Unità in 1944, served as the starting point of an association that integrated these perspectives: the 'Nuova secessione italiana' ('New Italian Secession'), established between the end of 1945 and the beginning of 1946.

In a way similar to the Primo and Secondo manifesto di pittori e scultori, the Manifesto della Nuova secessione Italiana presented these artists as a 'post-avant-garde', insofar as they conceived the avant-garde as a concluded historical episode, yet, at the same time, intended to continue carrying on the avant-garde fight against academicism:

'Eleven Italian artists, substituting an aesthetic of forms for a dialectic of forms, intend to make their apparently contrasting tendencies converge in a synthesis only recognisable in their future works. This clearly contrasts with the preceding syntheses, which have been the result of theoretical and a-priori determinations... [These artists] intend to reach an essential basis of moral necessity by means of their singular affirmations in the world of images, their observations, accumulating them as acts of life. Painting and sculpture, thereby converted into instruments of declaration and free exploration of the

world, will become increasingly in tune with reality. Art is not the conventional depiction of history, but history itself, which cannot ignore men.'⁶⁰⁷

The original signatories were Birolli, Santomaso Cassinari and Vedova, followed by Marchiori, Giovanni Cavicchioli and Alberto Rossi; and there were calls for Venturi, Michelangelo Maschiotta, Umbro Apollonio, Marco Valsecchi, Argan, Corrado Maltese, Luigi Ferrandi and Banfi to join. Mafai and Marini had declared their support, but did not sign up. Levi participated in some 'Secessione' exhibitions, such as that held in 1947 at Milan's 'La spiga e corrente' Gallery, but he was the leading Italian Social Realist; and refused to participate in the 1948 Biennale. Finally, 1930s socially engaged personalities, such as Mafai, Marini and Mucchi, remained outside the group.

In 1947, Guttuso and Argan proposed to rename the group 'Fronte nuovo delle arti' ('New Art Front'); and emphasised the need to address concrete historical subject-matter. Even though they stressed the instrumental character of art in social processes, they made it clear that these artists were not exclusively pursuing any single artistic programme. The Realist character of their works would be in evidence as a result of the experience of the works themselves. Their value would reside in the extent to which the artists had undertaken a direct treatment of the object, and not in the extent to which they conformed to pre-determined aesthetic rules or a given Subject-matter.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁷ Manifesto del 'Fronte nuovo delle arti', 1947, reprinted in Paola Barocchi (ed.), op. cit., p. 53.

⁶⁰⁸ See Serra Zanetti, Paola, op. cit.

However, the question of how to reconcile the technical development of art with social preoccupations began to generate polemics as early as the 1947 'La spiga' exhibition. In it, works such as Birolli's Contadino con panocchia (Peasant with Corncob) were reviewed by Argan as 'painting of protest, and not a mere gesture.'⁶⁰⁹ This stress on political activism increased during the year in which the 'Fronte' carried on any real activity. This is made explicit in the catalogue for the room that the group occupied at the Venice 'Biennale' of 1948. First, they had merely talked of art. Now, however, Marchiori was writing the catalogue in political terms:

'In the months that followed the end of the war, the achievement of Freedom in Italy brought about the search for comprehension among divided and suspicious men; it looked as if everybody wanted to start again, without a past, and find the rationale for his work in human solidarity, which had been denied and betrayed for so many years.'⁶¹⁰

The 'Fronte' artists rejected the production of a common style, but they were committed to democratising art and work for a mass public. This audience, however, was perceived to be politically progressive but aesthetically conservative and in need of some preliminary artistic education. To reach it, they knew that they had to count on the PCI, because it was the only post-war party, with a consolidated mass organisation, whose programme linked cultural and social renewal. Earlier, politicians needed artists to illustrate their

⁶⁰⁹ Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Pittura', 'catalogo della mostra alla spiga', reprinted in Sauvage, Tristan, 'Pittura italiana del dopoguerra', Milan, 1957, pp. 55-56, in Serra Zanetti, Paola, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

programmes. Now, however, artists needed politicians to bring their intellectual dynamics to a conclusion.

⁶¹⁰ Marchiori, Giuseppe, 'Sale XXX, IX and XL, il Fronte nuovo delle arti', Catalogo XXIV esposizione arti visive, Biennale di Venezia, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 166-167.

4. **Togliatti's Intervention and the Crisis of the 'Fronte' of artists**

After the polemics with Vittorini and the establishment of the Cultural Commission in 1947, there followed a period of more intense engagement by the Communists in art matters. Their intent was to push the 'Fronte' to depict even more explicit political content in a more conventional style. At first, the Communists' interventions were welcome among the artists, but they eventually came into conflict with the determined way in which some of the artists defended their freedom of research. As a result, the 'Fronte' split in 1948 and those with a party card and still faithful to wider artistic concerns, such as Guttuso and Trombadori, found themselves in a compromising situation: They were viewed as retrograde by the Abstract artists because of their commitment to figurative art. At the same time, they had been called to order by Togliatti for being aesthetically too audacious, and Sereni perceived them as obsolete bourgeois intellectuals.⁶¹¹

What, however, moved the PCI to carry on such a hard-line politics and, eventually, provoke the split of the Left-wing front of artists? A pro-Soviet current certainly existed, but the Zhdanovian anti-modernism never became a consolidated cultural alternative in Italy. Moreover, Togliatti's open and conciliatory attitude had brought the party, and himself, substantial political profits. Yet, the polemics were set off by an unexpected attack on the artists launched in Rinascita on the occasion of an exhibition organised by the 'Alleanza della cultura' at Bologna's Re Enzo Palace. There, several well-

⁶¹¹See Nello Ajello, *op. cit.* p.248.

known works were exhibited by Turcato, Vedova, Pizzinato, Birolli and Guttuso; works that had been already shown in the 'Biennale'.⁶¹² No Communist official had intervened then, but, now, Togliatti felt that it was his right to do so, as the 'Alleanza' was a Communist-sponsored organisation and Bologna was one of the Party's showpiece cities:

'It is a huddle of monstrous things: reproductions of so-called paintings, drawings and sculptures, organised by the "Alleanza della Cultura" of Bologna, have been exhibited in that city in a "First National Exhibition of Contemporary Art". How can this be called art and, what is more, "new art"; and how is it possible that they were able to find in Bologna, a city of such rich cultural and artistic tradition, so many brilliant people ready to pass this off as an artistic event. These people have used their authority to put before the public this exhibition of horrors and imbecilities. Let's tell the truth: these brilliant people agree with us; none of them believes that any of this foolishness is art, but they think, perhaps, that, to look like "men of culture", it is necessary... to pretend to be super-experts and supermen and pile up nonsensical sentences. Go ahead! Be brave! Do as the little boy in Andersen's tale did: say that the king is naked and that foolishness is foolishness. You will gain because you will be sincere and the artists, or the so-called artists, will get angry in the beginning but, then, it will do them good.'⁶¹³

⁶¹² See Paola Barocchi (ed.), op. cit., footnote 1, p. 77.

⁶¹³ Roderigo di Castiglia, 'Segnalazione', Rinascita, Rome, October 1948 (b).

This statement signalled a major point of friction between the PCI and the 'Fronte nuovo delle arti'. It seemed as if Togliatti intended a sort of purge of the 'Fronte', to provoke a split by which 'polemical' artists were left politically deactivated; and a more cohesive group of Communist artists could be organised. The 'artists with a party card'⁶¹⁴ who had exhibited in Bologna, immediately reacted and published an article, in the following issue of Rinascita, in which they made a claim for artistic freedom and stated the main outlines of their politically engaged art: Firstly, for them, internationalism and Modernism was a historic condition for the de-fascistisation of Italian culture. They argued that:

'... The characteristics of Italian bourgeois reactionaries deny intellectuals the avant-garde positions they held in countries where the bourgeoisie played a more vital role. Instead, [the Italian bourgeoisie] has isolated intellectuals. Fascism produced a theory of such isolation and blocked the intellectuals in cultural autarky.

The role of Italian intellectuals in these years consisted in becoming conscious of their objective historical isolation and included speeding up the assimilation of artistic expressions produced in other countries. However, such a rush to catch up prevented a deep critical judgement of these

⁶¹⁴ Pietro Consagra, Renato Guttuso, Aldo Natili, Paolo Ricci, Mario Mafai, Giulio Turcato, Nino Franchina, Leoncillo Leonardi, Mario Penelope, Saro Mirabella, G. Vittorio Parisi, Giuseppe Mazzullo, Concetto Maugeri, Paolo Bracaglia Morante. See 'Per una nostra "segnalazione"', Rinascita, V, pp. 470, 1948, p.p. 469-470.

tendencies, although this does not mean that [Italian intellectuals] assimilated them merely in a mechanical and passive way.’⁶¹⁵

The artists argued that such a process of de-fascistisation was not free from the risk of falling into snobbery or superficiality, but they lamented Togliatti’s sweeping criticism ‘because, despite being justified, it does not bear in mind that all young progressive Italian artists and ourselves, as party members, are already engaged in this issue; we fight to transform contemporary art.’⁶¹⁶

In the second place, the artists criticised Togliatti’s ignorance of contemporary artistic practice, and hinted that he was overstepping the limits of his competence as the head of the PCI:

‘Moreover, the Rinascita article makes indiscriminate judgements on an exhibition which was aimed at showing the different tendencies in Italian Modern art, seeing a whole series of dissimilar works and artistic values as “monstrous things”.

... We know that we ought to free ourselves from intellectuallist positions, that is: from an art which is detached from the world and reality as it develops, [and] which objectively [works] at the service of the ruling class... However, we cannot proceed according to the principle of “tabulae rasae”... Instead,

⁶¹⁵Per una nostra “segnalazione”, Rinascita, V, 1948, pp. 469-70.

⁶¹⁶Ibid.

we want to enrich the expressive possibilities of a kind of art which is able to merge with the struggle of the working class; and also with recent [artistic] experiences. Such an art can only come into being and spur our fight if it is truly art; and not merely naturalistic illustration...'⁶¹⁷

Finally, the artists underlined that the show had been warmly welcome by Bologna's workers:

'The fact that the Emilian co-operatives have helped the Italian artists [in the organisation of the exhibition] is a very relevant *cultural fact*... Initiatives such as this tend to create new "consumers" in place of the old ruling class, which is already unable to absorb the new products of modern culture.'⁶¹⁸

However, in the end, the issue for Togliatti was not a matter of aesthetics, but of politics. The artists complained that he was making 'indiscriminate judgements' when he called the whole of the works exhibited 'a huddle of monstrous things'. In the following number of Rinascita, he stopped discussing the pictorial qualities of the works displayed at the 'Re Enzo' exhibition to point out the inability of the artistic languages employed to achieve an effective rapport with the Proletarian public they were addressing. For Togliatti, there was, indeed, a contradiction between the artists' means of expression and the social commitment that inspired the activities of the 'Alleanza della cultura'. He underlined that the artists should consider the

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., p. 470.

characteristics of their public, so that an effective communication could be ensured. Even though the show was aimed at a working class public; and the Emilian cooperatives had collaborated in the organisation, the paintings exhibited were not understandable by the workers. Yet, it was likely that such workers would consider the 'Re Enzo' exhibition as a left-wing event, and therefore assume that such art had to be appreciated because of party discipline. Togliatti was suspicious about the uncritical rush to assimilate international languages and feared that the artists' 'snobbery' in relationship with international art could infect his constituency. If events such as the 'Re Enzo' exhibition were to signal the paradigm for Left-wing cultural activity, this meant that the rank-and-file might end up 'liking' modern art just because their highly respected comrades-artists had told them to do so. Togliatti argued that the average Italian worker had still a long way to develop in terms of culture. But he thought that events such as the 'Re Enzo' exhibition produced only mechanical equations of Modern and politically progressive art in the workers' minds; and they would do nothing but prevent a deep rapport between art and the proletarian public; and reproduce, in the practice, the subaltern role of the workers that was characteristic of Modern society and culture: 'Serious damage would be done if we did not fight such a spiritual state of the public, and particularly amongst our public.'⁶¹⁹ The 'Re Enzo' exhibition was not, for Togliatti, a mere artistic event, but an act of hierarchic cultural politics which, if accepted by the PCI as it stood, could mean that party culture 'would lack one of the main conditions for the progress of taste,

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., p. 470.

⁶¹⁹ Roderigo de Castiglia, *op. cit.* (1948) (a), p. 470.

either of the general artistic consciousness or the artists' expressive potential.⁶²⁰

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

5. The Reaction Against Realism: 'Forma 1'

5.a. 'Forma 1' and Its Artists

After 1947, the Communists increasingly put forward the question of artists' engagement as a demand to pursue an 'understandable' figurative style which they identified with a concept of 'Realism'. Meanwhile, influential Modernist critics were for their part treating the history of Modern art as an inexorable evolution towards self-reference. Neither of these contending perspectives were illegitimate as such. But disagreements, after events such as the 'Re Enzo' exhibition and the 1948 'Biennale', had led to the practical impossibility of a broad 'Fronte' of artists who intended 'to make their apparently contrasting tendencies converge in a synthesis.'⁶²¹

For Marchiori 'Today, the political character of every manifestation of life, including art, has been asserted on the one side; and art's freedom on the other side. Thus there is no more reason for the "Fronte".'⁶²² Autonomy of art was viewed by party officials as neglect of art's social duties, but there did exist the possibility of another reading of abstract art, from a left-wing perspective. Voices within the 'Fronte' and the PCI claimed that the emancipatory power of 'free' Abstract art from bourgeois ideology was politically valuable. From 1947, the Forma 1 journal was established as a part of the 'Fronte' with the aim to rescue Abstract art from the established reading

⁶²¹ Manifesto del 'Fronte nuovo delle arti', 1947, reprinted in Paola Barocchi (ed.), op. cit., p. 53.

⁶²² Giuseppe Marchiori, 'Dichiarazioni de G. Marchiori', Cronache veneziane, March 1950, reprinted in Giuseppe Marchiori, op. cit., p. 165.

within the Left and produce instead a formalist Marxist art. It grouped together Turcato, Concetto Maugeri, Achile Perilli, Carla Accardi, Ugo Attardi, Mino Guerrini, Antonio Sanfilippo, Piero Dorazio and Pietro Consagra.

These artists did not have a conventional fine arts training, but had studied at the 'Centro sperimentale di cinematografia', where they had escaped the influence of the Roman School. Precisely, they vindicated Formalism as the only way to free contemporary painting from Expressionist psychologism and other tendencies that subordinated the arts to alien intellectual disciplines, be these in the direction of Scipione's alienated deformations or Guttuso's grand political narrative. Their manifesto declared that:

'We hereby proclaim ourselves "Formalists" and "Marxists", convinced as we are that the terms Marxism and Formalism are not "irreconcilable", especially today, when the progressive elements of our society must maintain a "Revolutionary" and "avant-garde" position instead of settling into the mistake of a spent and conformist Realism that in its most recent experiences in painting and sculpture has shown what a limited and narrow road it really is.

The need to bring Italian art to the level of the current European language, forces us to take a clear-cut position against every silly and biased nationalist ambition and against the gossipy and useless province that present-day Italian culture is.⁶²³

⁶²³ Forma 1' Manifesto,' Rome, 15 March 1947, reprinted in Italian in Paola Barocchi (ed.), op. cit., pp. 65-66. The English translation is taken from Germano Celant (ed.), op. cit.

The Forma 1 project contemplated a technical renewal of Italian art inspired by the developments of European Abstract art. But they also intended to open a polemic with artistic trends based in 'traditional practices' and the 'illustration' of ethical or political values. In their manifesto, they went on to assert that:

- '1. In art, the traditional, inventive reality of pure form is all that exists.
2. We recognise Formalism as the only means to avoid decadent, psychological and Expressionistic influences.
3. The Painting and the Sculpture have as their means of expression: colour, draughtsmanship, plastic masses and, as their goal a harmony of pure forms.
4. Form is a means and an end; Painting must also be able to function as a decorative complement to a bare wall and Sculpture as a furnishing in a room -the goal of a work of art is usefulness, harmonious beauty, weightlessness.
5. In our work, we use the forms of objective reality as the means to attain objective abstract forms; we are interested in the form of the lemon, and not the lemon.'

They also explicitly rejected:

- '1. Every tendency aimed at inserting human details in the free creation of art, by the use of deformations, psychologisms, and other contrivances; the human is determined through the form created by man as artist and not by his a posteriori preoccupations with contact with other men. Our humanity is realised through the act of life, and not through the act of art.
2. Artistic creation that posits nature, sentimentally intended, as the starting point.
3. Everything not of interest to the goals of our work. Every assertion of ours originates from the need to divide artists into two categories: those positive, who are of interest to us, and those negative, who are not of interest to us.
4. The arbitrary, the apparent, the approximate, sensitivity, false emotionality, psychologisms, as spurious elements that compromise free creation.

Rome, 15 March 1947. ACCARDI, ATTARDI, CONSAGRA, DORAZIO, GUERRINI, PERILLI, SANFILIPPO, TURCATO.⁶²⁴

'Forma 1''s reading of Modern art was thoroughly different from 1930s Abstract Rationalism or other antecedent Italian non-figurative art. There

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

were no attempts to link it with the national artistic heritage, in a search for the a priori conditions of aesthetic experience.

Contemporary to 'Forma 1', there was a group of Florentine artists who had signed a Manifesto dell'astrattismo classico (Manifesto of Classical Abstract Art) in which they revived the social and cultural programme of the Como architects, including their drive for applied arts and the rejection of intimism. Vinicio Buti, Bruno Brunetti, Alvaro Monnini, Gualtiero Nativi and Mario Nutti put forward a historical reading of Tuscan Renaissance architecture and intended to underline its continuity with Modernism, in the belief that Abstract art was the objective and synthetic expression of contemporary society.⁶²⁵

The ambiguous link between 1930s Milanese and 1940s Tuscan Rationalism was provided by the architect Giovanni Micheluzzi, who had been commissioned to build Santa Maria Novella train station in 1932-34. Yet, the retrospective interest for national art and its relationship with modern-day social reality, typical of the Classical Abstract Artists, rejected Como's Fascist vindications of Mediterranean spirituality; and was the result of a more undetermined Progressive social commitment, independent from political parties.

That lack of a wider political programme meant that, after the immediate post-war period, these artists increasingly tended to a kind of Abstract Expressionism which substituted that earlier constructive attitude by a sense

of social protest. For example, in Buti's 1948 work titled Incastri (Assemblages), a group of disparate red and black blocks find a harmonic arrangement. But three years later, in Racconto n.3 (Report Number 3, 1951), Buti's earlier constructive attitude is substituted by a more expressionist combination of strong red, green and black colours.⁶²⁶

In contrast to the Florentines, 'Forma 1' did not conceive Abstraction as the contemporary and historic form of social perception, but as the standard-bearer of artistic freedom; and as an antidote against ideology -which they intended to link, albeit polemically, with the cultural politics of the PCI. A more immediate historical antecedent than the Group of Como was, in the case of 'Forma 1', the influence of Eastern European avant-garde art.

Modern Russian painting could be seen quite often in Italy, throughout the early Fascist years. Already in 1909, Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova had exhibited at the 'Galleria delle due isole'.⁶²⁷ More novelties from the USSR arrived with the occasion of the 1924 Biennale, where works by Ivan Puni, Liubov Popova, Varvara Stepanova and Alexander Rodchenko were on display. By then, these artists had already developed a discourse of full involvement with the Bolsheviks that took critical distance from artistic

⁶²⁵ 'Continuità: arte in Toscana 1945-1967' (Continuity: Art in Tuscany 1945-1967), a recent exhibition with an important section on Classical Abstraction, has taken place at Florence's Strozzi palace in May 2002.

⁶²⁶ See catalogues of the exhibitions Continuità. Arte in Toscana 1945-1967, Ibid.; and Viaggio nell'architettura del novecento: la Toscana, Regione Toscana and Fondazione Micheluzzi, Santa Maria la Novella Train Station, Florence, 2002.

⁶²⁷ See Mario De Micheli, Le avanguardie artistiche del Novecento, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1996, p. 268.

idealism.⁶²⁸ Even during the most autarchic years of the Fascist regime, in the 1938 XXI 'Biennale', for instance, there were exhibitions by Archipenko, Larionov and Goncharova.⁶²⁹

In 1915, the Roman-based Futurist Balla, Fortunato Depero and Enrico Prampolini published 'Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo' (Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe) and 'Scenografia e coreografia futurista' (Futurist Scenography and Choreography), in which a proto-constructive attitude was made explicit, also in Italian art. From the mid 1920s, Prampolini increased his interest in applied arts and mass communication, publishing a handbook for Futurist stage design: L'atmosfera scenica futurista (Futurist Stage Atmosphere, 1924).⁶³⁰ Lucio Manisco, a painter associated with 'Forma 1', tells Nadja Perilli that, 'through Futurism, they became linked to the great movement of Bolshevik art from 1919 to 1923. We were familiar with this work because Perilli and Dorazio used to visit archives, and had started to work on the rehabilitation of Futurism.'⁶³¹

⁶²⁸ See Various Authors, Catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit. For a discussion on the Russian avant-garde and its relationship with the Bolsheviks, see Larissa A. Zhadova, Malevitch, Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art, 1910-1930, Thames and Hudson, London 1978; Susan Compton, The World Backwards: Russian Futurist Books, 1912-1916, The British Library, London, 1978; and Sheila Mary Fitzpatrick, The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet organisation of education and the arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921, Cambridge University Press, London, 1970.

⁶²⁹ See Erika la Rosa, op. cit. (1999), pp. 122-124.

⁶³⁰ Emily Braun, op. cit., (1989), p. 179.

⁶³⁰ See Enrico Crispolti, 'Second Futurism' in Emily Braun (ed.), op. cit. (1989), p. 167.

⁶³¹ Nadja Perilli, interview with Lucio Manisco, Various Authors, Catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit., p. 77.

In addition, the 'Forma 1' artists counted on the key friendship of Angelo Maria Ripellino, a lecturer of Russian language and literature. Dorazio remembers that:

'Malevitch, for example... Nobody knew of his existence. Ripellino was the only one in Rome... He had a lot of books that he got in Prague, and we could see Rodchenko, Tatlin and others whom nobody from Rome knew in 1946-47. He read and translated Mayakovsky's poetry for us; and also the little poets of Stalin's court. This made us think that current Soviet culture had been built on the ruins of Revolutionary culture. The latter was the culture that really fascinated us and made us look forward to a Socialist future of the entire world.'⁶³²

'Forma 1' artists shared the Constructivist and Futurist interest in utilitarian art for a wide range of social purposes. They declared that 'painting must also be able to function as a decorative complement to a bare wall and sculpture as furnishing in a room -the goal of a work of art is usefulness, harmonious beauty, weightlessness';⁶³³ and they were involved in stage design for the latest cultural novelties, such as the 1948 decoration for the first jazz concert ever to take place in Rome, at the 'Splendore' cinema, by Dorazio, Guerrini and Perilli.⁶³⁴

⁶³² Piero Dorazio, Talk between Piero Dorazio, Dario Durbé and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, Catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit., pp. 144-147.

⁶³³ 'Forma 1' Manifesto, Rome, 15 March 1947, reprinted in Italian in Paola Barocchi (ed.), op. cit., pp. 65-66. The English translation is taken from Germano Celant (ed.), op. cit., p. 712.

Futurism and early Constructivism also provided these artists with their sense of social criticism. They were interested 'in the form of the lemon, and not the lemon';⁶³⁵ postulating that the pictorial sign has an arbitrary relationship with the referent. Form was presented as human production, and not as naturally linked to the object. As Argan explained in the Ulisse journal, '[the new Abstract art]... aims to put "ab ovo" the problem of art as an activity of the spirit, that is, to formulate a new aesthetics.'⁶³⁶

In this way, even though a stress is put upon aesthetics, in 'Forma 1' art was conceived in an actively both anti-metaphysical yet at the same time universalist sense. In this case, universalism was achieved by means of the rejection of both melodramatic calls to action and Expressionist psychologism induced by contingent individual or historical needs. In Argan's words:

'It would be a mistake to consider Abstract art as mere aestheticism, as art for art's sake. On the contrary, the common programmatic motif of the different Abstract trends is the justification of the artistic event as a social event... In answering the undoubtedly legitimate question of how the explicit, destructive historicism of Abstract art can be combined with the undoubtedly positive scope of its social interests, it can be argued that this art does not constitute itself as an achieved social end (which indubitably supposes a full consciousness of history). Rather it intends to define the condition of the

⁶³⁴ See catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit.

⁶³⁵ Forma 1' Manifesto, op. cit.

man's social consciousness, his way of being in reality and the limit of his horizon. In its detachment from all interest, it acknowledges ... the condition of a kind of life that is "engaged" and "involved", instead of detached and merely reflective.'⁶³⁷

Forma 1's reflection upon the historic limits of human perception of being-in-the-world postulated that society and the self are constructed and controlled by systems of representations. The artists conceived their commitment as a liberating diagnosis and revelation of the manner in which these representational systems operated. In this way, they thought, Marxism and Modernism would become harmonised. Accordingly, the artists did not transmit edifying examples of existence through picturing. Instead, by means of art's autonomy, art acted upon the viewers' psyche, questioning their schemes of perception and predisposing them to a more lucid experience.

In this respect, they were arguing about the very foundations of the movement inaugurated by 'Corrente', whose artists focused their artistic search in achieving both rational and emotional evidence for their political beliefs. Oltre Guernica's thesis of Picasso as the frontier artist between Modernist Criticism and Socialist construction was rejected because it presented a reductive interpretation of Cubism, based on the late 1930s and 1940s Picasso of social commitment and calls to action (i.e. Guernica). So doing, they thought, Oltre

⁶³⁶ Giulio Carlo Argan, 'L'arte astratta', 'Ulisse', II, 1948, reprinted in Paola Barocchi (ed.), op. cit., p. 72.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., pp. 73-75.

Guernica compromised the Internationalism of Italian painting and reduced the revolutionary possibilities of Cubism in the field of formal research.⁶³⁸

Accordingly, in their polemics with engaged Realism, the 'Forma 1' artists rather looked at the works produced by Picasso and Braque in the early years of the century; as well as Italian examples of Divisionist scientific explanations of the constructed character of figures, such as Giuseppe Pellizza Da Volpedo; and their later development in Balla and Boccioni.⁶³⁹ In 'Forma 1', however, the complexity of analytic Cubism is reduced to the minimum, and the artists tended to use indicative titles, in the search of a maximum of economy and readability. A representative work in this sense is Perilli's Praga (Prague, 1947) [Illustration 47, Perilli: illustrations 47-49], where he reflects on the problems of the translation of the spatial articulation of a three-dimensional urban landscape onto a flat surface. He postulates that the conventionally figurative structure of painting, according to Renaissance perspective, has resulted from an automatic process; it has metamorphosed from a tool for the knowledge of reality to a hierarchical entity that fixed the standards of 'adequate' representation. This limited the collective power of imagination and corresponded to the contemporary repressive social structure. Perilli shows its working by dismantling it. Sharp triangles, which are evocative of Prague towers, are superimposed onto the canvas, while mixed, impure colours on a grey background suggest an unified landscape.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁸ See *ibid.*

⁶³⁹ Talk between Piero Dorazio, Dario Durbé and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴⁰ See Various Authors, catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, *op. cit.*

Dorazio [Illustrations 50-55] undertook an investigation into the constructed character of the idea of pictorial unity in Petit poème socialiste (1948) [Illustration 50], a painting defined by the art historian Paola Serra Zanetti as 'the anatomy of routine.'⁶⁴¹ In it, Dorazio produced a rhythmical repetition of countless groups of lines and tonal harmonies, painted on the occasion of the Prague Festival of Youth, which was intended to reproduce the structure of optimistic Socialist rhetoric.⁶⁴²

Other works by Dorazio and Maugeri [Illustrations 56-57], such as, respectively, Ferrovia Roma-Vetelli (Rome-Vetelli Railway, 1947) [Illustration 51] and Filobus no 1 (Tram number 1, 1950) [Illustration 57], seem to look closer at Balla's Futurist research into the connection of movement with fragmentation of the figure. Structural concerns are combined with greater attention to colour, and their relationship with light and form. This is a marked interest in the case of Dorazio, Perilli and Sanfilippo [Illustrations 58-59]; and becomes a priority in Accardi [Illustration 60].⁶⁴³

Turcato's work [Illustrations 61-62] is an attempt, within the group, to overcome the atmosphere of confrontation spurred on both by sections of the PCI and 'Forma 1' itself. He attempted to synthesise 'expressionistic' technical devices with both a 'cubistic' attention to form and Communist commitment to 'realist' subject-matter. The result can be seen in works such as the 1949-50 series of Rovine di Varsavia (Ruins of Warsaw) [Illustration

⁶⁴¹ See Paola Serra Zanetti, op. cit., p. 39.

⁶⁴² See Gabriele Simognini, 'La luminosa continuità della coscienza storica nell'opera di Piero Dorazio', catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit., p. 131-39.

61]. These were produced after a trip to Poland in 1948, and seek to offer a suitably modernised 'abstracted' representation of the ruined walls of Warsaw buildings after the Nazi repression of the August 1944 uprising. Although the events told are immediately recognisable, they are treated as series of visual impressions deprived of the emotiveness that the subject-matter conveyed in the immediate post-war period. There is no narrative, but impressions of colour and rhythm. Thus, in this case, the relationship that Turcato establishes between the subject-matter and the means of expression prevents the works becoming mere decoration, but neither they can become instrumental to any specific political programme. They do not provoke any directly sympathetic response, but rather they invite the viewer to reflect upon the way in which such subject-matter was commonly represented.

The detachment, rationalism and anti-Expressionism that characterised the work of the majority of the 'Forma 1' artists contrast with Consagra's dramatism [Illustrations 63-64] as shown in works such as Totem della liberazione (Totem of Liberation, 1947) [Illustration 63]. This sculpture is conceived as a dramatic symbol of an epoch of uncertainty. Concrete and iron, industrial materials, transmit a strong feeling of historic contemporaneity. These elements are left uncovered to achieve 'a higher dramatic effect';⁶⁴⁴ and are arranged in enigmatic forms, organised according to an interplay of masses and voids. The arbitrary relationship between the Liberation, the precise geometric composition and the semantic inscrutability of the metallic

⁶⁴³ See Lorenzo Benedetti's interview to Carla Accardi in Nadja Perilli, op. cit., p. 107.

⁶⁴⁴ Pietro Consagra, interview with Gabriela di Milla on June 1964, catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit., p. 120.

construction seems to re-introduce a certain Expressionism and puts forward a political question: the impossibility of finding a widely shared language, despite all expectations, able to secure a reference to the contemporary social and political situation.

5.b. The Rupture with the PCI

Perilli wrote that 'Art is Abstract today because all values and conservative constructions have collapsed for good in the two last crises that have shaken the world.'⁶⁴⁵ In the interview with Nadja Perilli referred to above, Manisco added that: 'The philosophical perspective consisted in the rejection of bourgeois society, because it no longer had any valid content. We needed to move towards Abstract art because there was nothing in that society to represent.'⁶⁴⁶

In sum, it was acknowledged that art should intervene in society with its own weapons. Under capitalism, there was a problem of art as such: that of the return to artistic form as a problem, which is at the basis of Modern artistic research. Such form meant to have a living, operating character, able to move the viewer to a deep achievement of social consciousness.⁶⁴⁷ The objective of 'a kind of art that aimed to represent 'the form of the phenomenon',⁶⁴⁸ consisted, therefore, in discovering the sociality and the

⁶⁴⁵ Nadja Perilli, op. cit., 2001, p. 77.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ See Giulio Carlo Argan, Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus (1951), reprinted by Einaudi, Turin, 1988.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

commitment by themselves, to justify them in the present, and not to assume them because of a pre-ordered party directive.

Dorazio has pointed out that their manifesto also meant an explicit reaction against Stalinist art⁶⁴⁹ because, on the Socialist Realist model, as Argan explains, 'the artist gave up his own autonomous research and expression because he had already achieved his moral freedom, when he made his ideological choice.'⁶⁵⁰ From the point of view of the 'Forma 1' members, the Socialist Realists had ceased to be artists to become party officials; and they made it clear that it was impossible to be a socialist artist if one is not an artist at all; that is, somebody primarily concerned with aesthetic issues. To the question 'why the PCI has always fought 'Forma 1'?'⁶⁵¹ Manisco replied to Nadja Perilli that 'It was the period of Stalinist culture; and art was required to serve the party. (N.P.) And why could not Abstract art do so? (L.M) because they wanted art to be propaganda, to support the social struggles of the PCI. That's why Guttuso was so esteemed.'⁶⁵²

Regarding the openly politicised art of Communist Realist artists, Dorazio argued that 'we had just come out of a time of disillusion, and we were very suspicious. We were very enthusiastic (and so I am now), but we were mistrustful. So, before enthusiastically rushing into Socialist Realism, we looked for alternatives...'⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁹ See Piero Dorazio, 'Per Salvatore Scarpitta' in Luigi Sansone (ed.), *Scarpitta*, Milan, Mazzotta, 1999, p.31.

⁶⁵⁰ Giulio Carlo Argan, op. cit. (1970), p. 633.

⁶⁵¹ Nadja Perilli, op. cit., p. 77.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Talk between Piero Dorazio, Dario Durbé and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, op. cit., p. 147.

It is an indication of the openness of the Italian situation, however, that despite these differences, the 'Forma 1' manifesto was actually produced in Guttuso's studio at via Margutta.⁶⁵⁴ Moreover, at one point, Guttuso was able to obtain PCI sponsorship for 'Forma 1' when he managed to get the party to give Maugeri, Consagra, Turcato, Accardi and Sanfilippo a grant to travel to Paris.⁶⁵⁵ In addition, their relationship with the PCI allowed 'Forma 1' to display their works at an Exhibition of Young Italian Art organised by the Czechoslovak National Youth Front in Prague in 1947, with the occasion of the First World Festival of Youth.⁶⁵⁶ But Manisco remembers that, for them, the main reason to visit via Margutta was a practical one: 'Guttuso had so much more than us... In his studio, there always was a bottle of wine, bread and salami; and a good atmosphere, with the people who came to visit him.'⁶⁵⁷

The 'Forma 1' manifesto coincided with the PCI exclusion from government, the establishment of the Cominform, and the beginning of a period of political confrontation that signalled the failure of the Resistance project. With the division of the world into opposed camps supported by powerful mass propaganda apparatuses, ideology came to be perceived as a social condition of the epoch, and not as a distinctive feature of capitalism. In such a situation, a committed, active and deconstructive nihilism seemed to the 'Forma 1' artists to be the only possible choice. Perhaps, their main limitation

⁶⁵⁴ See Paola Serra Zanetti, op. cit.

⁶⁵⁵ See Ibid., p. 33.

⁶⁵⁶ See 'Cronaca di Forma 1, 1946/1951', catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit., pp. 58-59.

was that they still aimed to be framed within the Left, but 'Forma 1' did not go beyond opening a discussion with 1940s Communist culture in terms of mere rejection, and began indiscriminately attacking other Left-wing artists. The 'Forma 1' split with the PCI had its origin in a polemic with Trombadori in November 1947. It began when they published a letter in L'Unità in which post-war engaged figurative painting as a whole was treated as:

'A return to an antiquated and academicist Realism, even near 19th Century Verism. They have returned to the 19th Century because they did not understand that... a revolution in content is only possible if it goes hand in hand with a formal language dialectically evolved out of the preceding one...

The commitment to new forms and social renewal meant a dangerous dualism that brought some people to Expressionism and some others to illustrative Cubism. In this obscure situation..., painters who clearly followed Abstract tendencies appeared.

[These painters also reject] European Surrealism in its ultimate American version, [where] a worn-out metaphysical automatism prevails. ⁶⁵⁸

To Left-wing Expressionism and post-Cubism, the Forma 1 artists opposed their rationalist Abstract art:

⁶⁵⁷ Nadja Perilli, op. cit., p. 77.

⁶⁵⁸ Accardi et al., 'Gli astrattisti', L'Unità, 13 November 1947, p. 3.

'Abstraction has nothing to do with this. Form is valuable in itself, without Freudian or evocative claims.

The corrupted mood of the bourgeoisie has no place in Abstract painting, which consists in the continuous control of lines and colours, and not in naturalistically depending on visual reality. The painter here employs his own rationality, and not vague literary evocations.

We let the public and the critics judge which is the really progressive perspective.

Accardi, Attardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Guerrini, Manisco, Maugeri, Mirabella, Peirce, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato.⁶⁵⁹

Trombadori's reply was published alongside the letter. He agreed with the criticism of Surrealism, but added that the 'Forma 1' members 'live in a chaos of theoretical improvisation, grammatical incapacity and ignorance of the elementary principles of figurative language (Except Turcato, who is a talented painter and, despite his wishes, quite distant from Abstract art).'⁶⁶⁰

Possibly referring to analytic Cubism, Trombadori made clear that his criticism of 'Forma 1' did not mean criticism of Abstract expressions 'with theoretical foundations in non-Euclidean geometry', adding that 'these treat a series of mathematical questions which belong to contemporary culture.'⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Antonello Trombadori, 'Gli astrattisti', L'Unità, 13 November 1947, p. 3.

Trombadori denied the possibility of a kind of painting purely concerned with form, and stressed that criticism of conventional Renaissance perspective posed, in fact, a geometrical question which could itself be considered as providing a distinct subject-matter. Realism understood as the explicit representation of reality was a cornerstone of post-war Marxist aesthetics; and a concern with form in its own right was viewed as impossible, the result of mere theoretical confusion. In 1950, Stalin would make the same argument in a Pravda article titled 'Marxism and Problems of Linguistics'. In it, he denied that language is part of the superstructure and, therefore, historically mutable. Instead, he treated it as a persistent, almost natural element that serves all classes. The question was what language says, its subject-matter; and not the forms of language itself:

'It is more than a hundred years since Pushkin died. In this period the feudal system and the capitalist system were eliminated in Russia, and a third, a socialist system has arisen. Hence two bases, with their superstructures, were eliminated, and a new, socialist base has arisen, with its new superstructure. Yet, if we take the Russian language, for example, it has not in this long span of time undergone any fundamental change, and the modern Russian language differs very little in structure from the language of Pushkin....

And this is quite understandable. Indeed, what necessity is there, after every revolution, for the existing structure of the language, its grammatical system and basic stock of words to be destroyed and supplanted by new ones, as is

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

usually the case with the superstructure? ...What would the revolution gain from such an upheaval in language? ...The old superstructure can and should be destroyed and replaced by a new one in the course of a few years, in order to give free scope for the development of the productive forces of society; but how can an existing language be destroyed and a new one built in its place in the course of a few years without causing anarchy in social life and without creating the threat of the disintegration of society? Who but a Don Quixote could set himself such a task?⁶⁶²

Translating this argument from linguistic to painterly terms, in 1974, however, Perilli retrospectively argued that the form of reality was not the result of the mechanical activity of the eye, but consists in complex historically definable processes of memory and imagination whose working had to be unveiled. 'Forma 1' artists had intended to produce a critique of narration and linguistic codes, that is: 'to break our visual routine and mental habits. This is a logical-rational way of using the irrational to activate a complex form of communication. Geometry is not an optical tool for perceiving a true space; but a "machine" used in the mysterious process of human imagination.'⁶⁶³

The 'Forma 1' article and Trombadori's response created an atmosphere of confrontation that prevented progress from these competing positions. This was equally something that could not be done in Russia. But it was something that artists such as Guttuso were struggling to do in Italy. The

⁶⁶² Stalin, Josef V. Marxism and Problems of Linguistics, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1950, online Version at the Stalin Reference Archive (<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1950/jun/20.htm>), 2000.

⁶⁶³ Achile Perilli, 'Teoria dell'irrazionale geometrico,' in Nadja Perilli, op. cit., p. 159.

abstract artists' rejection of figurative engaged painting as a whole suited Communist critics claims that 'Forma 1' was, in fact, merely making 'second hand'⁶⁶⁴ Futurism with the aim of pleasing 'American snobs'.⁶⁶⁵ Only Turcato tried to relate one tradition to another, at least he did so from the point of view of the established stylistic dichotomy between Abstract and Realist art. That conventional distinction was in fact overridden by the objective he set out to accomplish: namely, initially to stimulate the audience to criticism, and then to fully engage them in political struggle. He argued that critical painting is 'intended to disrupt conventionally "veristic" visual perception. This is what Abstract painting does. At other times, however, a dynamic figurative painting can do it too.'⁶⁶⁶

Despite the polemics, Turcato, Accardi and Sanfilippo were still included in the 'Fronte's' room at the 1948 Venice Biennale. Consagra, Attardi [Illustration 65] and Turcato continued to take part in left-wing initiatives, such as the 1950 'Art Against Barbarism' exhibition, and the Suzzara Prize.⁶⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Dorazio, Guerrini and Perilli became increasingly involved with State-related Italian Modern Culture. For example, the catalogue of their 1949 show at the Chiarazzi Gallery was introduced by Palma Buccarelli, the director of the National Gallery of Modern Art. In it, Buccarelli stressed the social dimension of their painting. There was no explicit reference to Marxism, but politically correct statements of social engagement were voiced:

⁶⁶⁴ Antonio Del Guercio, 'Inglese e astratti', L'Unità, 23 December 1947, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Giulio Turcato, interview with Giovanna della Chiesa, March 1986, catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit. p. 223.

'This art claims to be "social", that is: opposed to individualism. It rejects Humanism in the Renaissance sense... It wants to be a collective anonymous and utilitarian art useful for everybody.'⁶⁶⁸ However, these same artists still kept trying to promote left-wing art in polemical opposition to Stalinism in Italy. In 1950, for example, they organised an exhibition at Rome's 'Age d'or' bookshop titled 'Civil Abstract Art in Czechoslovakia', showing works by dissident 1920s Constructivists, including Karel Teige, Josef Istler and Jan Smetana.⁶⁶⁹

Faced by a range of conflicting demands and pressures, 'Forma 1' dissolved in 1951. Thereafter, its members would take separate ways: Turcato joined the Venturi-sponsored 'Gruppo degli Otto' in 1952, alongside artists who had been related to the PCI to various different extents but were now 'disenchanted' with Communist cultural politics (also to different extents).⁶⁷⁰ Venturi emphasised Gli Otto's monolithic reaction against 'political' art, arguing that they were convinced that, as artists, 'to give priority to political considerations... [was a] contradiction'.⁶⁷¹ However, Turcato was still a PCI member. For their part, Accardi gave up politics; Attardi shifted to engaged, politically explicit figurative painting; and Dorazio, Guerrini and Perilli joined

⁶⁶⁷ See 'Ugo Attardi' in Mario Cadalora Alberto Lui, Antonello Negri and Marco Rosci, Opere del premio Suzzara, 1948-1953, Comune di Suzzara and Associazione Galleria del Premio Suzzara, Suzzara, 1996.

⁶⁶⁸ Palma Buccarelli, Catalogue of the Dorazio, Guerrini and Perilli exhibition at the Chiarazzi Gallery, quoted in 'Cronaca di Forma 1, 1946/1951', catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit., p. 68.

⁶⁶⁹ See 'Cronaca di Forma 1, 1946/1951', catalogue of the exhibition Forma 1 e i suoi artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato, op. cit.

⁶⁷⁰ The 'Gruppo degli otto' was composed by Birolli, Morlotti, Antonio Corpora, Afro Basaldella, Santomaso, Turcato, Mattia Moreni and Emilio Vedova.

⁶⁷¹ Lionello Venturi, op. cit. (1952), p. 287.

Gillo Dorfles, Mario Balloco, Gianni Monet, Munari and Atanasio Soldati in establishing in Milan the Movimento d'arte concreta (MAC).⁶⁷²

From the point of view of the Communists, the fact that these artists had dropped the term 'Marxist' from their manifestos, after 'Forma 1' dissolved, was a proof of their theoretical confusion; and the dead end that the movement really signified. For the Communists, Marxism was a matter of politics, and not of culture. They accordingly recognised that there was an ethical projectivity in 'Forma 1', but not a proper revolutionary political force; nothing that one could call 'Marxism', because their programme lacked a politically constructive dimension. As Corrado Maltese wrote in L'Unità, 'Abstract art intends to reject so-called bourgeois content and ends up rejecting every content, and it is not even able to communicate its feeling of revolt.'⁶⁷³ In this respect, the polemics between Marxist Formalist artists and the party apparatus reproduced Vittorini's case in the intellectual field and ended up with the same result: The artists' refusal to produce Socialist Arcadias could be criticised by party members such as Trombadori and Maltese, but that view was not party policy. Further proof of that is that the PCI had given 'Forma 1' material support. But, by the same token, PCI officials disliked manifestos in which Communist artists issued definitions of Marxist art. Quite deliberately, no official party directives on Communist culture had been issued in Italy; but still, culture was part of the wider activity

⁶⁷²Like 'Forma 1', the MAC considered subject matter an impurity to eradicate from painting and planned to carry out an aesthetic regeneration of Italy by exposing themselves to international art. In Dorfles' words, the project consisted in 'a search for formal purity and a new ideological internationalism.' (See Gillo Dorfles, *Manifesto del MAC*, reprinted in Paola Barocchi (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 104).

⁶⁷³ Corrado Maltese, L'Unità, 16 February 1949, p. 3.

of the party, and the PCI would not accept definitions of it, or even of Marxism itself, issued by individuals and not produced by collective elaboration within the scheme of party debate.

6. The 'realisti'

The notion of the critically-minded artist being promoted by 'Forma 1' was challenged in these years by a group of Communist affiliated artists, headed by Guttuso, who intended to collaborate with the party in the building of the working class movement through a programme of explicitly 'Realist' art. At times, their work took the shape of exacerbated anti-Modernism. The art historian Antonello Negri underlines the 'realisti's' radical break with the tradition of Modernism when he writes that 'it is difficult to understand their new Realism as a natural development of the post-Cubist movement. It was determined by contingent historic factors linked to choices in the ideological and political field.'⁶⁷⁴ At other times, however, 'realisti' art was presented as the dialectical overcoming of the avant-garde by criticising, not its technical innovations, but its social context. In a speech to the Seventh PCI Congress of 1950, Guttuso called Communist artists to engage with:

'A realist and immediately readable art for everybody; an art that expresses new, contemporary and edifying contents and, because of that, connects with our great figurative national tradition... We defend continuity and development in art, and put it in relationship with social development. [we view art] as a reflection of society... However, this does not mean that we passively follow public taste developed in bourgeois society. [Bourgeois society] has produced both an hermetic and disintegrating art for an élite; and

⁶⁷⁴ Antonello Negri, Il realismo degli anni trenta agli anni ottanta, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1994, p. 94.

a figurative, easy, superficial, stagy and poster-like art for the poor... Our task is to produce real beauty for everybody'.⁶⁷⁵

For the 'realisti', their aesthetics were indissolubly linked to their politics, and this constitutes their main difference from other manifestations of post-war Italian art. To foreground aesthetic problems was, for them, an historical characteristic of Western European Art. They, however, claimed to have overcome Modernism and to work with political objectives. For Guttuso, precisely this is what constituted an artistic novelty: 'I hold that the Italians have been the only new voices of the post-war period..., [while] the European "avant-gardes" lacked strength to maintain their former freshness and originality.'⁶⁷⁶

The 'realista' tendency did not mean the merely illusionistic, mimetic or 'photographic' replication of physical reality, but the use of national and popular references to communicate with the masses. In the light of this it may be argued that the most interesting members of the group did not practise 'naturalist' painting. They were researchers into the history of aesthetic languages, whom Gramsci's work, published for the first time in the late 1940s, influenced deeply. Figurative art, in this case, reverted to tradition. But it also drew on the avant-garde: for example, Picasso and the Guttuso of the 1930s, insofar as these had been assimilated by the taste of the people. This resulted in the employment of a language for the masses that did not acknowledge any hierarchy between itself and a 'cultivated' language.

⁶⁷⁵ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1950) (c), p. 12-13.

⁶⁷⁶ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1955).

6.a. 'Realisti' Artists: Armando Pizzinato, Gabriele Mucchi, Giuseppe Zigaina and Renato Guttuso.

6.a.I. Armando Pizzinato [Illustrations 66-79]

Pizzinato's painting of the late 1940s is one of the most successful examples of the use of avant-garde resources for realist ends. In La grande aratrice, (The Great Plough, 1949) [Illustration 66] for example, according to Marco Rosci, his 'creative and existential maturity positively transforms the dialectics between mass readability and avant-garde experimentalism.'⁶⁷⁷ In this painting, the Plough is taken by Pizzinato as a contemporary symbol of labour, just like a hammer or a sickle, but also as pretext for a structural analysis of the object and the surrounding space.

A more ambitious example from a political point of view is Un fantasma percorre l'Europa (A Spectre Haunts Europe) [Illustration 67], painted in 1948 to commemorate the centenary of the Communist Manifesto and subsequently presented at the 1950 Venice 'Biennale'. The scene does not reproduce a particular historical episode, but, rather, is an allegory of the alliance of the working class and the peasantry. The space is anti-illusionistic, suggested only by the scaffolding, and the background is set by a combination of greens, blues, reds and yellows, following a strategy of meetings and oppositions which takes Guttuso's chromatic violence as the starting point. Finally, the spirit of inventiveness and the impetus of the

⁶⁷⁷ Marco Rosci, *Premio Suzzara, arte e società ieri e oggi*, in Mario Cadalora et al., op. cit. (1996), p. 17.

scheme are combined with a clear rhythm and an easy reading. The only problem is that Pizzinato's schematism tends to seem overly didactic, if compared to Guttuso's profusely populated paintings and narrative subplots.

6.a.II. Gabriele Mucchi

When 'Corrente' became a consistent cultural movement; and despite his personal friendship with its members, Mucchi [Illustrations 80-84] had not participated in the group because, on Guttuso's words, 'his nature distanced him from our exacerbated and furious gesticulations [and] our invocations to Europe.'⁶⁷⁸ Instead, he had retreated to intimate subject-matter and applied art. In the last years of the Second World War, however, he began to produce a kind of Realist painting of executed partisans, demonstrators, mothers and children, whom he depicted with shocking colours and distorted shapes.

In 1941, Mucchi had been excluded from a teaching position at Brera Academy for refusing to swear fidelity to Fascism. Later, during the War, many of his works,⁶⁷⁹ as well as his house, had been destroyed by bombs; and he lived the dramatic final months of the conflict in German-occupied Milan. These experiences resulted in a series of paintings titled La Guerra (War, 1949) [Illustration] in which he turns to the iconography of maternity to denounce the suffering of the common people. The mothers and children represented are not individualised characters, but rather incarnations of the

⁶⁷⁸ Renato Guttuso, Catalogue for the Gabriele Mucchi exhibition at 'La colonna' gallery, Milan, 1954, reprinted in Raffaele De Grada (ed.) op. cit. (1999), p. 33

⁶⁷⁹ Such as his murals for the 5th and 6th 'Triennale' and the 1944 'Mostra triennale delle terre italiane d'oltremare' (Exhibition of the Overseas Italian Territories').

people depicted according to an austere composition that imbues them with monumentality and presents them as the victims of evil ideologies.

Another painting on these lines is his 1949 Morte di Maria Margotti (Death of Maria Margotti), which represents the corpse of a demonstrating Ferrarese woman, shot dead by a carabineer, which is carried by her fellow rice-harvesters. Despite the fact that this painting was made at the time, soon after the killing took place, Mucchi avoids journalism and treats the question in terms of a long historic struggle between good and evil by employing a compositional scheme that recalls Giotto's Lamentation for Christ's Death. On other occasions, however, the result is not as satisfactory; and Mucchi's war experiences result in too affected canvases, such as Il bombardimento di Gorla IV (The Bombardment of Gorla IV, 1949) [Illustration 80], a painting of a group of mothers looking for their children among the rubble that re-creates another real event: On 20 September 1944, Mucchi was in Gorla, one of the outskirts of Milan, when he was caught in an air attack. '...A primary school was hit... Perhaps, the target was the big nearby Pirelli factory... but the school was hit and 206 children were killed. I saw the doors and windows of the houses around me breaking into pieces; and suffocating smoke and dust rising. As soon as I heard the aeroplanes leaving, I ran to where the flames were. The people were screaming and I helped to carry the wounded to the nearby Niguarda hospital...' ⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁸⁰ Gabrielle Mucchi's commentary on 'Il bombardimento di Gorla' (The Bombardment of Gorla) in Franco Russoli, Gabriele Mucchi, AGAM, Modena, 1965, p. 87.

The resulting painting may be seen as both a faithful and sophisticated illustration of the artist's feelings; and a historic document of the War years. Anyone could share Mucchi's impressions of such a tragedy. Nevertheless, in Il bombardimento di Gorla IV, Mucchi intensifies the shocking power of the image to an extent that prevents any reflexive insight. The critical-formal analysis characteristic of 'Forma 1' and Guttuso is lacking. Instead, his only intention is to touch the viewer by means of the exaggerated violence of the scene.

However, despite Mucchi's tendency to melodrama, and his employment of distorted forms and strident anti-naturalist colours during the post-war period, he denied being an Expressionist, and stressed that these pictorial resources were always put at the service of a richer grasp of reality. The East-German critic Fritz Cremer reported that:

'I told Mucchi that I was surprised to see so many Expressionist elements in his work. He replied that no Expressionist elements as such are visible in either his work or that of the Italian Realists... but strong "expressive" means... The emotive message trusted to the strong emotive colours corresponds to the scream of a people fighting for its social liberation. Mucchi's so-called Expressionism has nothing to do with bourgeois Expressionism, which is a limited point in bourgeois art that focuses on a sensual and private world... Mucchi is far beyond this.'⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸¹ Fritz Cremer, Preface to a Mucchi's exhibition at Berlin National Gallery, 1960, reprinted in Russoli, Franco, op. cit., p. 42.

Similarly, in 1979, Mucchi was defined by another German art historian, Lothar Lang, as 'a member of the hard nucleus of senior anti-Fascist masters... who depicted the drama of humankind. His art is a sympathetic reaction against the pain that late bourgeois society causes the people';⁶⁸² and, when commenting on Mucchi's tonal disharmonies, Ernst Heinz Lemper stressed that these corresponded to 'the dissonances of the social environment.'⁶⁸³

6.a.III. Giuseppe Zigaina

Zigaina belonged to a younger generation. His painting was characterised by a determined dynamism and by an attention to nature, whose greatness he intended to represent incarnated in the humble and common. In his *Bracciante* (Day-labourer, 1950) [Illustration 85], the strident use of colours makes the Postcubist composition, on which the painter develops a fluid drawing that resembles the 1930s Guttuso, still more aggressive. Yet, these resources are employed in order to allow the artist to express the emotion transmitted by the event depicted. Pizzinato delivers ideograms, visual expressions of the idea of Communism, and not a concrete event. Zigaina, on the other hand, delineates clearly the landscape in the background, transmitting a sensation of aridity and rough materiality that both contextualises and exalts the characters, as in a still from a Neorealist film. To quote Negri, 'here, the value of the formal search, apart from being evident in the references and the rhythmical-structural correspondences, is minimised

⁶⁸² Lothar Lang, *Künstler in Berlin*, Henschverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, Berlin, 1979, entry 18.

⁶⁸³ Ernst Heinz Lemper, Catalogue of Mucchi's exhibition at Görlitz Museum, Görlitz, 1961, reprinted in Franco Russoli, op. cit., p. 42.

in order to stress the clear pre-eminence of his testimony to the event and the scene's communicative vigour, which is represented with plain and readable evidence.⁶⁸⁴

6.a.IV. Renato Guttuso

Guttuso is the 'realisti' who most consciously attempts an agreement with the issues that Formalist Left-wing artists had put forward. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, he treated subject-matter related to the political struggle of the Southern day-labourers, such as Lavoro nelle terre occupate (Work on Occupied Land, 1949) and Figure in lotta (Fighting Figures, 1947) [Illustration 4]. Works such as these show how the Expressionist component returns to him when it is time to join the fight or to denounce repression. Then, he draws on the expressive possibilities of an anti-naturalistic use of colour to intensify the epic overtones of the scene. At other times, however, Guttuso undertakes a calmer analysis of his peasant characters, such as in Carrettiere addormentato (Sleeping Cart Driver, 1946) and Contadini a cavallo (Peasants Riding Horses, 1947) [Illustration 5], where the influence of Cubism becomes evident in the mental architecture superimposed on the emotive colouring. Reviewing Contadini a cavallo, Trombadori wrote in Numero that 'Guttuso's paintings are... the fruit of a passionate emotion that makes an effort to allow itself to become purified by style.'⁶⁸⁵ Another key work in this respect is Occupazione delle terre incolte (Marsigliese contadina) (Occupation of uncultivated land [Peasant Marseillaise]) [Illustration 6], which was dedicated

⁶⁸⁴ Antonello Negri, op. cit., (1994), p. 94.

⁶⁸⁵ Antonello Trombadori, 'Negli studi: Renato Guttuso', 'Numero Pittura', Milan, 1946, quoted in Giovanni Granzotto, 'Renato Guttuso dagli anni '40 agli anni '60', in Gaetano Bordonaro (ed.), op. cit., p.23.

to Neruda and made in 1947, a year of intense rapport with 'Forma 1'. The painting offers a summation of Guttuso's attempt to find a rapprochement between a technically reflexive Modernism and a politically engaged Realism. In it, the clear colours in which the female figures are depicted contrast with the black clothes of the men, the yellow stains and the reds of the flags to produce a strong emotional effect on the viewer in respect of the reality of the social subject-matter. Yet, at the same time, Guttuso's mixed techniques of watercolour, tempera and ink draw attention to the factitious character of the work, to its status as a constructed representation of that social reality.

Guttuso's intense engagement with the PCI accompanied a renewed interest in monumental figurative large-size painting. The most characteristic work in this respect is Battaglia di Ponte Ammiraglio (Battle of Ponte Ammiraglio, 1951-1952) [Illustrations 7-10]. In it, Guttuso narrates an episode of Giuseppe Garibaldi's war against the kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies, which would result in its unification with Italy. Bourbon despotism cannot resist the impetus of the Red Shirt guerrilla fighters. Among these, there is a self-portrait of the painter with a sword in hand. Yet, the overtone is far from celebratory. At the bottom of the picture, on the ground, another Guttuso, this time represented as a peasant, is lying dead by his cart.

When commenting on Battaglia di Ponte Ammiraglio, Levi has stressed Guttuso's commitment to the subject-matter and his employment of a clearly readable narrative with recognisable clues for a Sicilian person:

'The conception of a battle, the way the colour is applied, the absolute unity of the tone, returns to the figuration of the knights in shining armour and the crusaders on the carts.'⁶⁸⁶ The metaphor of departure is still a deep childlike impression: the gesture of the swords, the curve of the wounds, which determines the whole composition.'⁶⁸⁷

However, for Levi, Battaglia di Ponte Ammiraglio is not merely a celebratory historical painting. Garibaldi's war of annexation meant the arrival of a Modern, Northern, foreign culture to Sicily. Freedom from tyranny had been achieved, but an idyllic peasant world also disappeared with the Bourbons. There were both gains and losses, and despite the large size of the painting, Guttuso lives that process in personal terms by portraying himself simultaneously as a 'Red Shirt' and a dead peasant. Levi writes that 'a judgement and a complex experience are superimposed. That of the actor and that of the spectator: the peasant Guttuso dead next to his cart in that tumult, and the partisan Guttuso with his sword unsheathed.'⁶⁸⁸

Precisely, Guttuso underlines the narrated, illusionistic character of the scene by introducing these two portraits of himself and other well-known party members, such as Trombadori, in a non-contemporary time. Moreover, it is a Cubist structure of intense superimposition of different planes and angles of vision which remains, and which is combined with a calculatedly violent equilibrium of plain reds and blues that recalls Manet. Such effects, and the exaggerated conventionalism of the whole, draw the viewer's attention

⁶⁸⁶ The traditional Sicilian chariots are decorated with medieval scenes of war.

⁶⁸⁷ In Antonello Negri, op. cit. (1994), footnote 56, p. 108.

towards the means of expression themselves, equally as much as towards the subject-matter. Guttuso commemorates a historical event which was part of Italian Communist mythology. Yet, such effects introduce a debate on the very possibility of achieving a complete, definitive representation, and are intended to enable the viewer to become aware of the dangers of blind ideologies. Therefore, Battaglia di Ponte Ammiraglio gives the impression of being not one, but several paintings that are superimposed and relativize each other.

In much post-war literature, however, this painting was singled out as an example of what commentators regarded as a regressive tendency in Guttuso's work. Since his show in the 1948 Venice 'Biennale', sectors of the press had been lamenting that Guttuso ended up adopting 'the style of a cover for an agriculture handbook.'⁶⁸⁹ For these journalists: 'One could see a painter behind the style of "Crocifissione". But, now, there is neither a painting nor a painter.'⁶⁹⁰ The critic and collector Guido Ballo argued that Guttuso renounced his search for new expressive means in the post-war period,⁶⁹¹ and became an illustrator of party policy after Togliatti's admonishment during the 'Re Enzo' exhibition. Since then, 'for Guttuso, a new art could only be born out of "content" and the possibility of an immediate

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., footnote 56, p. 108.

⁶⁸⁹ Virgilio Guzzi, 'Il tempo', Rome, 15 September 1948, reprinted in Giuseppe Marchiori, op. cit. (1978), pp. 12-22.

, p. 173.

⁶⁹⁰ Bernardi, Marziano, 'Due civiltà artistiche che non si conciliano più', 'Gazzeta del popolo', Turin, 22 June 1948, reprinted in Giuseppe Marchiori, op. cit. (1978), p. 172.

⁶⁹¹ For him, the period before 1948 was characterised by 'the complete freedom of language. There was no conflict between invention, imagination and expressive urgency; all this found its integration by means of forms of poetic vitality.' In Guido Ballo, op. cit., p. 164.

communication with the masses.'⁶⁹² Accordingly, he would have turned to an 'understandable' figurative language in the direction of Géricault and Delacroix's French Romanticism and traditional Sicilian cart painting; and would have done so to the detriment of concerns that other contemporary examples of painting such as 'Forma 1', which conceived artistic practice in terms of freedom and autonomy, were being put forward.

Guttuso wrote in 1949 that, 'since the beginning, feeling myself to be a Communist was confused, in me, with feeling myself to be a painter. This is happening to me today and will happen to me in the future, I think, because I believe that art is one of the instruments for the transformation of this unjust and unfair society.'⁶⁹³

Because of this, Guttuso has been constantly accused of too often putting his political beliefs over his artistic concerns, and works such as those discussed above have been the main target of criticism.⁶⁹⁴ These could be perceived as weak attempts to harmonise art with politics and, in many cases, ended up resorting to melodrama and rhetorics to mask shadows and unsolved problems. Nevertheless, Guttuso himself rejected the view of his post-war painting as a regression. Rather, for him, it was the result of a critical assimilation of the whole range of 20th century art, including both Modernism and Socialist Realism: 'If the problem we are facing is that of content, in the first instance, of a direct and readable non-intellectualistic art; of an art more

⁶⁹² Ibid., p. 164.

⁶⁹³ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1949) (b), p. 12.

⁶⁹⁴ See Guido Ballo, op. cit.

connected to man, to his feelings, his suffering and his fight, then, this problem will not be solved by going backwards.⁶⁹⁵

In such a context, Realism appeared to Guttuso to be beset by a number of problems, arising from prolonged contact with the different modern artistic languages. Surely, he himself was also aware of the dilemmas resulting from contrasting his artistic and political programmes, and it is particularly in his still-lives where Guttuso becomes dramatically self-conscious of his drawbacks. For example, in works such as Natura morta con fiaschi e zucca (Still-life with Bottles and Pumpkin, 1947) [Illustration 11], Guttuso's depiction of the theme is beset by the problems that Morandi had addressed. Morandi's spaces isolate the objects and put forward questions regarding their relationship with the whole by means of gradations, combinations and clashes of colours and perspectives. For Morandi, this practice is lived in autobiographical terms, incarnated in everyday items that are also metonyms of popular life.⁶⁹⁶ Guttuso however tries to go beyond this limited view: While Morandi's epistemological coherence consists in inciting the viewer to experience never-ending relationships and differences between the objects and the enigmatic nature of the space in which they are contained, Guttuso is in the pursuit of a clear, objective and definitive solution to these questions. The aggressive colouring of the elements of his still-life is intended to signify the intensity of emotion with which he lives this process. He learns from Morandi, but struggles to integrate the objects within a totality capable of acting as a secure basis for his far more overt moral and political needs.

⁶⁹⁵ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1948) (a), p. 274.

⁶⁹⁶ See Emily Braun, op. cit. (1995), p. 102.

6.b. Communist Artists and Italian exhibition circuits after World War II

Gramsci did not merely define hegemony as the state of consent and conviction achieved in a given society by means of a philosophical discourse. He also stressed that consent and conviction takes place within a network of institutions.⁶⁹⁷ Similarly, for the 'realisti', the question of artistic technique was part of a broad notion of the art context that also highlighted the importance of the nature of the exhibition industry, the characteristics of the public and the premises for criticism. Accordingly, they sought to develop an alternative artistic network, including exhibitions, prizes and commissions, with the help of left-wing local governments and organisations.

The 1948 and 1950 'Biennale' had been highly polemical events.⁶⁹⁸ In the case of the Roman 'Quadriennale', its re-opening, in 1950, had been an initiative by Guttuso, Levi and Marchiori. The State nominated as president Antonio Boldini, who organised a wide range of retrospectives, from Canova to Arturo Martini, which accompanied the competition for the best Italian artist. The jury was composed by Mafai, Guttuso and Maccari; and the show was divided into three sections: pen and ink, with 132 designers; painting, with 551 entrants; and sculpture, with 170 sculptors.

During the inter-war period, the 'Quadriennale' had been trusted to the head of the Fascist Fine Artists Trade Union, Cipriano Efesio Oppo, who followed a

⁶⁹⁷ See Perry Anderson, *op. cit.* (1976-1977), pp. 18 and ff.

⁶⁹⁸ See my section: 'Emilio Sereni and the Cultural Commission', pp. 127 and ff.

pro-'Novecento' line, albeit oppositional artists had occasionally managed to overcome trade union filters.⁶⁹⁹ After the war, however, the watchword was eclecticism, with a wide range of artists allowed to participate, from the older Balla, Carrá, De Chirico, De Pisis, Morandi, Prampolini and Severini, to the middle generation, including Mafai, Levi, Maccari, Sassu, Savinio, Pirandello, Guttuso, Birolli, Morlotti, Santomaso, Turcato, Vespignani, Vedova, Fontana and Manzú, to the still younger Titina Maselli, Dorazio, Sanfilippo and Consagra.⁷⁰⁰

Before the first post-war Venice Biennale of 1948, and the 1950 'Quadriennale', individual and public collectors were almost non-existent, and local prizes were the only artistic events. The oldest ones seemed to be just an informal meeting of artists,⁷⁰¹ but some of them became cornerstones of long-term artistic policies and were used to accompany the project of a gallery. A characteristic example was the Gallarate Prize, an initiative of Silvio Zanella, the president of Gallarate Association of Graduates, which, in the 1950 first exhibition, counted on the collaboration of Ballo and the cultural entrepreneur Dino Villani.

⁶⁹⁹ See my sub-section "'Corrente" and the Road Towards Postcubism', pp. 220 and ff.

⁷⁰⁰ See Floriano de Santi, 'La VI Quadriennale', Various Authors, Il 1950, premi ed esposizioni nell'Italia del dopoguerra, XX premio nazionale arti visive città di Gallarate, Civica galleria d'arte moderna, Comune di Gallarate, 19 novembre 2000-11 febbraio 2001, op. cit., pp. 189 and ff.

⁷⁰¹ For example, the Lissone Prize, organised from 1946, was presented as a dissident voice, not against, but, rather, unrelated to politicised Post-Cubism, despite being an initiative of the PCI members Gino Meloni, a 'realisti' painter, and Giovanni Funagalli, the director of Pavia 'realisti'-orientated '15 Borgonuovo' gallery. Meloni and Funagalli intended to enrich the production of art in the Milan province and gathered artists such as Migneco, Santomaso, Vedova, Guttuso, Pizzinato and Birolli; and also De Chirico, De Pisis, Funi, Rosai and Radice. In Milan, A short-lived counterpoint was the Oltre Guernica Prize, created by Vedova and Morlotti the same year. On this occasion, the objective was to honour the memory of the painter Ciri Agostini, who had died in Partisan action. Finally, in Rome, Dorazio, Perilli and Vespignani had participated in a 1945-1946 initiative called 'Arte sociale' Prize (See Luciano

The objective of the Gallarate Prize was 'the cultural updating of the citizenship and the creation of a Gallery.'⁷⁰² Moreover, Villani proposed to make the prize the occasion for a popular party; and organised a series of events 'to honour the Gallarate Prize',⁷⁰³ including several talks by Ballo; the Social Show of Handmade Ceramics, the comedy Pick-up Girl, by the Virtus Theatre Group; boxing, and the 'Miss Gallarate' and 'Miss Smile' competition. Moreover, the Gymnastic Society organised competitions of hammer, discus, weight, pole vault, a 7 Kilometres race, and cycling for children and women. Other initiatives were the Coca-Cola competition for waiters, a frogs race, and the 'Baby Gallarate' beauty competition for children. The prize, in sum, was an excuse for the town people to meet together and have fun.⁷⁰⁴

Regarding the works exhibited, the jury sought to offer 'an eclectic and panoramic view of current Italian art.'⁷⁰⁵ In reality, however, the entrants gravitated around the tradition of 1930s Milanese Abstract art. Silvio Consadori won the 1950 first prize with a painting titled Composizione (Composition); the second prize was for the Como group artist Mario Radice for Composizione pentagonale (Pentagonal Composition), and the third one was awarded to Giuseppe Migneco for a Self-portrait. This decision was strongly criticised by the Varese PCI newspaper, L'ordine nuovo, which found a contradiction between the social scope of the prize and the awards:

Caramel, 'I premi e gli sviluppi dell'arte nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra. Il confronto tra realisti e astrattisti, in *Il 1950*', in *Ibid*, p. 25.

⁷⁰² Se Emma Zanella Manara, 'Il premio Gallarate', in Il 1950, premi ed esposizioni nell'Italia del dopoguerra, XX premio nazionale arti visive città di Gallarate, Civica galleria d'arte moderna, Comune di Gallarate, 19 novembre 2000-11 febbraio 2001, op. cit., pp. 41-63.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid*.

'A disgusting pleasure in destruction lies at the root of Modern art. To reduce three dimensions to two means to go back seven hundred years. To remove figures or the landscape from a painting, and reduce it simply to chromatic values, is to neglect the artist's responsibility... If painting is to have an educational scope, they should not forget to be more comprehensible to the people.'⁷⁰⁶

The prize was also opposed by Il corriere della sera, an organ of the provincial Gallarate bourgeoisie, which declared that 'the Gallarate population supports 19th Century art or "Novecento"... And now, suddenly, we are given this horrible show. This is a stab with a lance in the side of our province. Where is the desired "meeting" between public and artists that the organisers had planned?'⁷⁰⁷

left and right alike criticised the event, albeit for different reasons. Il corriere della sera found it too audacious, while, apart from a deficient knowledge of the artistic issues at stake, behind the L'ordine nuovo hostility lay the fact that 'realisti', socially committed examples of painting had been excluded from the main prize.⁷⁰⁸ After these criticisms, Ballo and Villani resigned from the 1951 exhibition. From 1952, Emma Zanella Manara perceived 'a decisive turning

⁷⁰⁴ See Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵ Catalogue of the 'Premio nazionale di pittura città di Gallarate', 1950, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷⁰⁶ G.A. 'Ordine nuovo', 10 June 1950, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷⁰⁷ L. Borghese, 'Sulle rive dell'arno lombardo si discute di "ottocento" e "novecento"', 'Il corriere della sera', 2 June 1950, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷⁰⁸ Apart from Migneco, the 'realisti' appeared in Gallarate only after a few years, when their polemical impetus had weakened and they were only the subject of retrospective interest. Entrants of 1955 included Tettamanti, Treccani and Francese. In 1957, Guttuso, Zigaina and Migneco joined these. See *Ibid.*

point in the choice of artists: Abstract artists, Concretists and Venturian Abstract-concretist were accepted, invited and given the award.'⁷⁰⁹

This helped the Gallarate prize to increase its prestige within the professional arts world. Meanwhile, left-wing initiatives to endow the event with a more popular character were in vain. These included the suggestion of A. Nannia, a contributor of La prealpina journal, who proposed to choose a 'People's Commission', composed by ten people of both sexes, from intellectuals to workers, who would select ten works among which the jury of experts would decide the winners.⁷¹⁰ For Zanella Manara, 'luckily, advice such as this, which would lead to the artistic provincialisation of the prize and the gallery, went unheard.'⁷¹¹

However, a similar system to that proposed by Annia was adopted by the organisers of the Francavilla Francesco Paolo Minchetti prize from 1949. This time, the jury proposed ten works to be voted by the people.⁷¹² The event was held from 1946, as an initiative of Amedeo Pomilio's newly-created newspaper Unione genti d'Abruzzo, the local cultural entrepreneur Roberto Marchi and the MP Giuseppe Spartaro.

The scope of the prize was to contribute to the reconstruction of the town. Immediately after Mussolini's dismissal on September 1944, the Francavilla

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

⁷¹⁰ See A.Nannia, 'Ancora proposte sulla mostra di pittura', 'La prealpina', in Ibid, p. 62.

⁷¹¹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁷¹² See Francesca Maria Consoni, Il premio Minchetti, in Il 1950, premi ed esposizioni nell'Italia del dopoguerra, XX premio nazionale arti visive città di Gallarate, Civica galleria d'arte moderna, Comune di Gallarate, 19 novembre 2000-11 febbraio 2001, op. cit., p. 168.

people had organised the first ever Italian partisan unit, and had liberated several British prisoners. In retaliation, the town suffered a 'Panzer' raid and, then, it was bombed by the Allies during the Cassino battle.⁷¹³ Thus it could have been a natural setting for post-war engaged painting. However, Marchi consciously wanted to avoid appearing to be attached to any one artistic school or political option. The first exhibition was for landscape painting. Among the entrants, there were engaged 'realisti' such as Giovanni Consolazione, Domenico Cantatore and De Grada, together with artists of the Inter-war period, including Funi and Rosai; and a De Pisis one-man show.⁷¹⁴

The following 1948 competition was held under the motto 'art among the ruins', and involved the participation of Mucchi, Morlotti, Radice, Sassu, Prampolini and Ampelio Tettamanti, among others. Moreover, there were exhibitions out of competition by Rosai, Sironi and Cantatore.⁷¹⁵ Given the impossibility of counting on a gallery, the organisers intended, at least, to attract the attention of the public and the authorities on their difficult situation by giving the works as a gift to the American Government to acknowledge the help given during and after the war. This was a successful move from a financial point of view, because, in 1949, the U.S. Ambassador offered a 300,000 lire prize; and the Corriere di Napoli newspaper, the Minister of Education and the Bank of Naples agreed to purchase works and offered them to the Presidency of the Republic. This time, Zigaina and Balla joined the above artists, and the political instinct of Marchi ensured the support of both the Left and the Christian-Democrats. Accordingly, two sections were

⁷¹³ See Ibid.

⁷¹⁴ See Ibid.

established: one for religious art, and another one devoted 'to the glorification of Italian labour in peace and concord.'⁷¹⁶ The following exhibition continued on these lines, this time celebrating 'labour for the reconstruction of Italy', with the participation of Consolazione, Vedova, Purificato and Migneco, among others.⁷¹⁷ In 1951, however, DC and Liberal heavyweights, including De Gasperi, Giulio Andreotti and Croce attended. As a consequence, the 'realisti' withdrew, and only artists such as Morlotti, Menzio, Vedova and Prampolini participated.⁷¹⁸

The local prize that best matched PCI expectations was the Suzzara Prize, which still takes place in this Lombard village and was first awarded in 1948 under the slogan 'Labour and Labourers in Art'. Apart from experts, a peasant, a white-collar worker and a blue-collar worker made up the jury. They valued 'works of painting, sculpture and pen and ink inspired by the workers or by labour in its multiple expressions, made by artists of any tendency'; and awarded as prizes local products such as a calf, a horse, an economy kitchen, 8 kg. of motor oil or a Parmesan cheese.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ Quoted in Ibid., p. 112. The next year, the organisers defined further the kind of subject-matter to be accepted: 'portraits of workers, working atmospheres, landscapes with agriculture, factories or building sites and still-life with working tools' (Quoted in Antonello Negri, 'Gli inizi del Premio Suzzara tra neocubismo e realismo', in Mario Cadalora et al., op. cit. (1996), footnote 3, p. 13.). In the practice, however, rural scenes prevailed over the urban ones. This was a consequence of the agricultural character of Suzzara, but it also was a limitation of the cultural range of the Prize. In any case, urban and industrial images were not lacking. Among these, Tiziana Fantini's Il tranviere (The Tram Driver, 1948) and Francesco Trombadori's La fabbrica (The Factory, 1950)

The prize was the brainchild of the village's Communist major, Tebe Mignoni, the Suzzarese Villani and the filmmaker Cesare Zavattini, who was from the nearby village of Luzzara. They managed to overcome the disputes within the PCI, and with the art world, with an exhibition that, according to Negri, 'aimed at a kind of artistic Ecumenism that would satisfy a range of different tastes (for cultural, ideological and social reasons) which were impossible to lead back to a common model... The Prize was intended to promote an art for everybody that the masses would like.'⁷²⁰

It is significant that, from 1950, the Suzzara prize counted on the attendance of representatives from the Czechoslovak, Polish and Hungarian embassies.⁷²¹ These countries had declined the invitation for the Venice Biennale of that year, following the decision of the USSR and the policy of the Cultural Commission.⁷²² However, Villani stresses the independence of the prize from Socialist Realism or any other artistic creed:

'It is true that "Neorealism" had taken possession of the prize in a way, to the extent that there was an obsessive repetition of themes... [However], the prize never had a programme, apart from bringing art closer to people, to that part of the citizenship who felt excluded from art. It encouraged artists to use an understandable language... The exchange of such disparate presents,

⁷²⁰ Antonello Negri, 'Gli inizi del Premio Suzzara tra neocubismo e realismo', in Mario Cadalora et al., op. cit. (1996), p. 11.

⁷²¹ See Erika La Rosa, op. cit., p. 99.

⁷²² See catalogues of the 1948 and 1950 Venice 'Biennale'.

erased the distance and made all feel like friends of each other, and committed to understand each other.'⁷²³

As for the artists, in 1948 there were 123 entrants.⁷²⁴ These included local amateurs and established professionals such as Sassu, Treccani, Mucchi, Zigaina, Guttuso and Pizzinato; the 'Gli otto' members Birolli, Vedova and Turcato;⁷²⁵ and some protagonists of the Inter-war years, who exhibited without competing, such as Carrà; Mario Sironi; Ottone Rosai and Pio Semeghini.⁷²⁶

Non-figurative works are rare items of the Suzzara collection. The majority of the artists practised, instead, a kind of figurative painting that, nevertheless, did not lack for diversity of subject and perspective. Some artists focused on intimate labour subjects, where they undertook psychological studies of working class characters exposed to harsh labour conditions. Examples include Treccani's La lunga strada (The Long Road, 1950) [Illustration 86] and Mucchi's La bestia morente [Illustration 84]. In them, the artists emphasized lines and volumes, in order to imbue the characters with dignity.

Other works aimed to provoke an immediate response in the viewer, in the face of contemporary political events, such as Giulio Ruffini's Pietà per il bracciante assassinato (Pity for the murdered Day-Labourer, 1950-2)

⁷²³ Villani, Dino, 'Il premio Suzzara, cronache e immagini, 1948', 1976, quoted in Erika La Rosa, op. cit., p. 100.

⁷²⁴ See Antonello Negri, 'Gli inizi del Premio Suzzara tra neocubismo e realismo', in Mario Cadalora, et al., op. cit. (1996), p. 11.

⁷²⁵ See *Ibid.*, footnote 5, p. 13

[Illustration 91], where the painter denounces far-Right terrorist violence against the Southern peasantry, achieving a strong dramatic effect by means of the violent contrast between the black clothes of the women and the white shirt of the man; and the audacious top-to-bottom perspective. Another painting of this kind is Aldo Natili's Uccisione di un bracciante (Murder of a Day-labourer, 1950) [Illustration 88], a sympathetic representation of the event that recalls Goya.⁷²⁷ These examples still demand a certain elaboration of the political message on the viewer's part. Other works, however, leave nothing to the imagination, such as Paolo Ricci's Primo maggio (First of May, 1949) [Illustration 89]. This artist employs colours in a non-conventional way to intensify the power of their images of marching muscular workers carrying banners.

Despite its relationship with the Communists, Negri viewed the Suzzara prize as an eclectic experience that, precisely because of its eclecticism, signalled the failure of earlier efforts to integrate Modern art with Communist politics.⁷²⁸ However, some entrants still consciously sought for a synthesis between these, either by appealing to the original tradition of the 'Secessione' and the 'Fronte', or by attempting new solutions, but always in the search of the 'great work of art' that the 'realisti' artists had set out to produce.

Examples of the first case are Agenore Fabbri's terracotta Cavallo stanco (Tired Horse, 1948) [Illustration 90], which combines the influence of wartime

⁷²⁶ See catalogue Premio Suzzara, lavoro e lavoratori nell'arte, Suzzara, August-September 1948.

⁷²⁷ See Bonito Oliva's quotation in pp. 249-250.

⁷²⁸ See Antonello Negri, op. cit. (1994).

Expressionism with 1920s revivalism of Ancient art;⁷²⁹ and Birolli's Contadino con panocchia (Peasant with Corncob, 1946) [Illustration 39], one of the treasures of the Suzzara collection, since it was presented in 1948, which Birolli had shown for the first time at the first exhibition of the Fronte nuovo delle arti at La spiga gallery.⁷³⁰ In it, he shows a peasant eating anxiously. The Soutine and Van Gogh-like rough and arbitrary use of colour, in combination with the dislocation of the figure, is intended to transmit feelings of violence and solidarity with the human condition, lowered to the level of mere physical subsistence.⁷³¹

Guttuso's Boscaiolo (Woodcutter 1948) [Illustration 12] goes off in a different and more contemporary direction. In it, Guttuso abandons explicitly political subject-matter and Expressionist clashing colours. Instead, he emphasises the formal aspects by employing Léger's method of constructing the figures taking simple geometric elements as the starting point. Meanwhile, the strict architecture of Consolazione's Cucitrice (Seamstress, 1950) [Illustration 91] attempts an abstract synthesis of the meaning of labour. In this case, the outcome is a static and monumental work that does not, however, neglect individual detail in the representation of the figure.

In Miniera, [Illustration 62] although the level of abstraction of earlier works is reduced, Turcato employs the different stylistic resources of 'Forma 1'. In this

⁷²⁹ See Joan M. Lukach, op. cit. (1989). Also, Maria Teresa Roberto's commentary on 'Ragazzo seduto' ('Sitting Boy', 1931) and 'Maternità' ('Motherhood', 1929), Martini's two entries for the 1931 'Quadriennale', displayed in Turin's Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, in Rossana Maggio Serra and Riccardo Passoni, op. cit., p. 184.

⁷³⁰ See Paola Serra Zanetti, op. cit., p. 13.

case, the centrality of the subject-matter is only relative, because he also seeks to compose elegant harmonic rhythms of colours and lines. Other examples by younger artists, such as Sineo Gemignani's Torniante di isolatori (Turner of Isolators, 1952) [Illustration 92] and Aurelio Caminanti's Fruttivendoli (Fruit Sellers, 1952) [Illustration 93] bear in mind the lesson of Roman Abstractism as well, subordinating the figures to purely pictorial interplays of lines and complex harmonies of colours. Another significant work of the Suzzara prize, is Titina Maselli's Autista in piazza (Bus Driver in the Square), the winner of 12 shirt lengths of fabrics offered by the Gallarate Prize [Illustration 94].⁷³² In it, Maselli substitutes Turcato, Gemignani and Caminanti's lyrical and sophisticated permutations of colours by thick brushstrokes and sharp contrasts of whites and blacks.⁷³³

6.c Workers' Commissions for Mural Painting

Together with personalities of national and international reputation, local masters worked for the organisations of the Left-wing world. Active in Bologna, Aldo Borgonzoni [Illustrations 97-107] depicted political and historical subject matter according to an iconography based on Guernica. When he won the first Suzzara Prize of 1948, he already had an important record in producing mass political art in the Bologna province, where he

⁷³¹ See Marco Rosci, 'I realismi, da Birolli a Zigaina', in Mario Cadalora et al., op. cit. (1996), pp. 15-16.

⁷³² See Erika La Rosa, op. cit., p. 99.

⁷³³ See other examples of the Suzzara collection in volume II, illustrations 95-96.

decorated the wall of the Vignola PCI premises⁷³⁴ and the 'Camera del lavoro' (Trade Unions Building) of Medicina, his hometown.⁷³⁵

Borgonzoni was not an artist of national or international reputation and he never attempted to be so. He rather recalls the exacerbated localism of the 1930s 'Strapaese'. In Medicina, he developed, in 1948, a narrative of the gradual emancipation of the workers, through historical episodes eventually projected in visions of the Socialist future: a life of poverty and hardship set off the first revolts of the Medicinese workers during the 1930s. These originally were based on trade-unionist claims of better labour conditions, until it evolved, first, into anti-Fascism and, after the war, into explicit Communist commitment. Representations of the hard work done by the Medicina people to reconstruct the town after the War end up with an image of a happy family surrounded by food and all sorts of material goods, which symbolises the future, the promised happy end for their painful history.

Borgonzoni's painted surface occupies 45 x 3 metres. It begins with a scene titled Disperazione (Desperation) [Illustration 99]. Then, an account of the workers life and struggle under Fascism follows. It includes Lo sciopero delle

⁷³⁴ In Vignola, Borgonzoni produced a painted surface of 4'5 x 20 metres, dedicated to Gramsci's life, now destroyed [Illustration 107]. It included the scenes Antonio Gramsci at Turin in 1911, Gramsci Imprisoned, The Oppressed Family (The Victims of the Bombardments and the People Executed during the Nazi-Fascist Reprisals), The Popular Insurrection, The Occupation of Uncultivated Land, The Dead of 9 January 1950 at Modena and Peace [Illustration 107]. Black and white photographs of some of these works are held at Bologna's Gramsci Institute. See also Lorella Grossi and Davide Barbieri, La pittura murale di Aldo Borgonzoni a Medicina, Grafis, Bologna, 1995.

⁷³⁵ The building was constructed from scratch in 1948 by the self-trained architect Dulio Argentesi, thanks to a subscription among the 7,000 members of the Trade Union, 50% of the town's population. It was inaugurated by the trade union leader Giuseppe De Vittorio in March 1948 before a crowd of 25,000 people (See Lorella Grossi and Davide Barbieri, op. cit.)

mondine medicinesi di 1931 (The strike of the Medicinese Rice-harvester Women in 1931) [Illustration 100]; L'attesa della libertà (Waiting for freedom) [Illustration 101]; La prigionia (carcerati anti-Fascisti) (The Prison [anti-Fascist Prisoners]) [Illustration 102] and La guerra (The War) [Illustration 103]. The opposite wall tells of the reconstruction of the village with the scenes Il ritorno alla vita (The Return to Life); Le arti (The Arts); Espressione del lavoro locale (The Expression of Local Labour) [Illustration 104]; La famiglia socialista (The Socialist Family) [Illustration 105] and La festa dei lavoratori (The Workers' Celebration) [Illustration 106].

The way in which Borgonzoni constructs the figures, taking solidified elemental plastic masses as a starting point, transmits an overall impression of monumentality, to which he adds a range of purples, blues, reds, yellows, whites, browns and blacks that establish anti-naturalistic relationships with the drawing, and are arranged in different ways to express the states of mind that the scenes suggest. Together with the main narrative interest, which is underlined by the rigorous chronological organisation of the murals, the artist shows some concern for the purely pictorial qualities of the characters, the objects and the backgrounds.

According to Tiziano Tassoni, the mayor of Medicina in 1995, the mural in the 'Camera del lavoro' 'constitutes a great testimony to the direct relationship, established between the workers, their trade unions and the arts in the immediate post-war period. It is, therefore, the expression of a historic

moment where art and social life were strongly connected.'⁷³⁶ Borgonzoni had been brought up in Guttuso's version of Expressionism. He participated in the 1942 Bergamo Prize and had travelled to Paris, where he became familiar with Cubism. In Medicina, however, he was very worried about the opinion of his peasant employers, and did not want to do anything too audacious: 'they talk about [the painting] in the square and at the tavern. Some of them fear that I will do an abstract crazy thing.'⁷³⁷ The final result was by no means original, when compared with contemporary developments in Rome, Milan, Paris or New York. However, the citizens of Medicina had only seen the decoration of the several Baroque churches of the village and the neo-classical murals of the House of the Fascio.⁷³⁸ Therefore, it was surprising that the work was warmly welcomed among the Trade Union members, who paid Borgonzoni 350,000 lire, instead of the agreed 300,000. Arnaldo Fratelli wrote in Noi donne (the PCI publication for women) that the acceptance of the painting by the workers proved that 'The real people: our people, are intelligent. They lack bourgeois prejudices and understand modern art, if it speaks to their mind or to their heart.'⁷³⁹ In addition, Il calendario del popolo highlighted the novelty of the initiative, which the magazine regarded as the proof that 'collectors of the old kind are caught up in their decadence... [and] the working class has started to support their own artists, by commissioning their own paintings and murals.'⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁶ Presentation of Tiziano Tassoni to *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷³⁷ Aldo Borgonzoni, 'Il colore va in rima', July 1949, reprinted in *ibid.*, p.159.

⁷³⁸ These were destroyed when the trade unions and CLN parties occupied the building and there is no photographic documentation about them in the Medicina Trade Union of Council archives. See *ibid.*

⁷³⁹ Arnaldo Fratelli, 'Noi done', 24 July 1948, reprinted in *Ibid.*, p. 165.

Negri stressed that the interest in mural painting, in the post-war period, 'showed a diffuse idea of the relationship between art and the public that had its roots in the anti-bourgeois polemics against easel painting initiated in Italy with Sironi's interventions on mural painting in 1932 and 1933.'⁷⁴¹ The mural was also praised in the cultural pages of the overwhelmingly Leftist Emilia-Romagna press, where it was regarded as a work that had achieved a fair balance between stylistic innovation and communicability. Giuseppe Galassi stressed the importance of the mural format in Il giornale della sera. For him, modern research had persuaded artists to concentrate on easel painting because 'terms related to the analysis of the conventions of pictorial representation can be more firmly apprehended in this way... [Yet] these considerations distanced Contemporary painting from serious social engagement.'⁷⁴² Now, it was agreed that Borgonzoni had overcome such limitations in a successful way which avoided propagandistic temptations: 'The painter focuses on the human dimension more than on politics. This has prevented him from lowering the artistic level to mere polemics.'⁷⁴³

Furthermore, for the Emilia journalist Giulio Tavernari, the Medicina mural:

'Demonstrated the prestigious results achieved by Cubist techniques when these are applied to epic representation from Picasso's Taurómachy to Guernica. These are the moments where Modern art clearly proved its

⁷⁴⁰ 'L'arte é un impegno serio... o un giro senza regole', Il calendario del popolo, special issue, January 1951, p 33.

⁷⁴¹ Antonello Negri, op. cit. (1994), p. 109.

⁷⁴² Giuseppe Galassi, 'Sentimento del grano di risso', Il giornale della sera, 11 June 1948, reprinted in Lorella Grossi and Davide Barbieri, op. cit., p. 162.

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

Revolutionary nature, [because of] its contemporary character and its affinity with the moral and political forces that carry on the revolution.'⁷⁴⁴

Between 1953 and 1956, Pizzinato made a series of frescoes in the meeting room of the Parma Province Palazzo where he tells of the struggle of the local proletariat from Fascism to peace and reconstruction. In compensation for a less aggressive post-Cubist drawing than his late 1940s work, the organisation of the scene according to a chronological narrative line, such as that earlier employed by Borgonzoni, breaks off. On the wall to the left-hand side of the room, there is a contemporary scene entitled Metello with a group of builders at work and, below them, a still life with the book of the same title by Vasco Pratolini [Illustration 68]. Reading the wall rightwards, the viewer arrives, in a sort of flash-back, at two episodes in the anti-Fascist struggle in Parma, named after Le barricate del 22 (The 1922 Barricades) [Illustration 69] and L'eccidio di Bosco del 44 (The Massacre at Bosco in 1944) [Illustration 70]. The former is a scene of street riots with characters representing the various social types that participated in Parma's early anti-Fascist struggle. These include housewives, workers and middle-class people, easily identified by their external appearance. They are all lead by a pietá-like mother holding her dead son in her arms and who demands the viewer's sympathy. L'eccidio di Bosco del 44 is a war scene of partisans being massacred by the Nazis. Two complex murals follow where the artist illustrates the condition of post-war local labour: mechanised agriculture and industry. Continuing the scheme of the scenes of anti-Fascist struggle, workers and peasants are

⁷⁴⁴ Giulio Tavernari, 'Il pittore Borgonzoni a Medicina', 'Emilia', year II, 2, 1950, reprinted in *Ibid.*, p. 165.

depicted as the main social, political and productive forces of the province. Yet, the picture does not look like a mere figurative excuse to embody abstract social forces in a visual expression, for its political content is enriched by Pizzinato's attention to individual characters. He also composes groups in different attitudes, such as a boy playing with a cat, or a group of builders eating their lunch. These are, perhaps, both realistic and strictly speaking irrelevant to the clear political message that the artist is supposed to transmit.

This kind of mural painting spread throughout Central and Northern Italy during the 1950s; and most of them have been lost by now. In Broletto di Pavia, for example, Alberto Nobile and Giansisto Gasparini decorated the old Episcopal Palace (which, earlier, had been the House of the Fascio and, then, was squatted by Communists and Socialists) with scenes of L'Unità festival, charges of the anti-riot police, rice-harvesters, etc. In the 1950s, the Young Communists used it as a discotheque, and partly covered the scenes with lights and other decoration. Finally, the Council expropriated it and completely destroyed the murals.⁷⁴⁵

6.d. The International Environment of Italian 'Realisti' Art

The artists of national reputation who competed in Suzzara also exhibited in conventional spaces, such as Milan's 'Galleria la Colonna' and 'Bergamini', the 'del Pincio' gallery in Rome and Florence's 'Vigna Nuova'. In addition, they participated in the state artistic network, which had the Venice 'Biennale'

⁷⁴⁵ See Giorgio Piovano, *Pittura e vita a Pavia nel secondo dopoguerra*, in Mario De Micheli, *Artisti realisti nelle campagne pavesi degli anni 50*, Vangelista, Milan, 1984, pp. 45-48.

and the Roman 'Quadriennale' as its main axis. On the international front, they also made incursions in the American and British market.⁷⁴⁶ However, the obvious suitable International environment for their works was the Socialist bloc, above all, those countries with the strongest Modernist tradition, such as the German Democratic Republic.

In the GDR, post-war engaged art had evolved in a similar way to Italy: from the wide variety of styles characteristic of the Berliner 'Ruf' group ('The Reputation'), to a politically explicit Realism, still seasoned with some Modernists resources, that prevailed after the 1949 partition of the country in artists' groups such as Dresden 'Das Ufer' ('The Shore'), a collective organised by Otto Nagel [Illustration 108] and Hans Grundig [Illustrations 109-110] under the motto 'Against Formalism and for Realism'.⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁶ See Gaetano Bordonaro (ed.), op. cit., p. 125.

⁷⁴⁷ 'Das Ufer' was still deeply rooted in the complex German figurative tradition of the 1920s and 1930s. Dresden inter-war figures, such as Otto Dix and Hans Grundig, provided the group with a strong critical sense on political and historic issues with emblematic and hallucinatory scenes, such as Dix's tryptich Der Krieg (The War, 1929-32), a scheme later followed by Grundig in Das Tausendjährige Reich (The one-thousand-year Reich, 1935-38) [Illustration] and Den Opfern des Faschismus (The Work of Fascism, 1947) [Illustration]. Moreover, other Dresden artists focused in more private issues without losing the strong critical sense of inter-war German art. For example, Wilhem Lacnit's Paar unter einem Brücke represents a miserable, socially excluded couple coarsely having sex under a dirty bridge while, in the background, the lights of the elegant 'Deutsche Haus' (German House) hotel shine. On the same lines, Conrad Felixmüller produced images of Dresden marginalised characters, but, in works such as Liebspaar vor Dresden (Lovers in front of Dresden, 1928) he substituted Dix, Grundig and Lacnit's sympathetic critical bitterness by a more optimistic lyricism which redeemes his proletarian characters from their fateful destiny. (See Dresden Gallery of the New Masters).

After World War II, the influence of Socialist Realism in German art was consummated by means of a series of State exhibitions, commissions and party resolutions. In May 1946, the 'Deutsche Kunstausstellung der Deutschen Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung in der Sowjetschen Besatzungszone' (Exhibition of the German Central Direction for the Popular Education in the Soviet Occupied Zone) opened, followed, in August, by the 'Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung (All-Germany Art Exhibition); and the Second 'Deutsche Kunstausstellung' of 1949. The influence of Socialist Realism on GDR art was strong, but still insufficient to repress artistic sensibilities outside the 'Stalinist canon'. Felixmüller himself was largely responsible of the establishment of a genre of art which Eastern German art historians called 'Privateportraitzkunst', or portrait art for private consumption, where the conventions of Socialist Realism were more relaxed. After World War II, Felixmüller shifted towards representations of the Socialist person dressed as a proletarian, soldier, peasant or

The relationships between East German and Italian left-wing artists were intense and deserve a more in-depth research in the future. Mucchi played a key role in this respect by introducing many Western developments into the GDR through the door that the PCI had left open. East German critics were aware of their frontier role in Cold War confrontation and the importance of their rapport with Modernist-minded Italians to elucidate their own relationship with inter-war German engaged art by figures such as Kathe Kollwitz, Otto Dix or Grosz.⁷⁴⁸ In this country, there were no Zhdanov-style objections about the Italians 'realisti' being too attached to the avant-garde.⁷⁴⁹ In turn, they were doubly regarded as heroes of proletarian culture because, as well as being successful talented individuals, they 'have encountered the working and peasant class despite all the contradictions and seductions that the Italian bourgeoisie presented to them.'⁷⁵⁰ In this way, they were compared to the 'critical realism' of other 1930s admired foreign personalities such as Picasso,

intellectual, such as in the Portrait of the Writer Friedrich Wolf (1947) [Illustration 111]. However, in these paintings, he still undertook a complex analysis of the different individual and social personalities, despite the limitations of the themes (See Various Authors, Bild der Klasse, Die Deutsche Arbeiterklasse in der Bildenden Kunst, Verlag Tribüne, East Berlin, 1968, pp. 5-39 and 188). Other main points of reference in this respect are Fritz Cremer and the Berliner Otto Nagel. In 1957, Cremer made an idealised posthumous portrait of his friend Bertolt Brecht in which he took memories, Brecht's death mask, and photographs as the starting point. For his part, Nagel, who had been trained as an artist in Moscow, produced more conventionally figurative portraits, as seen in Neubauer, (The New Builder, 1949). However, Nagel's explicit Socialist Realism was not an hegemonic position in the GDR. Artists such as Joachin Heuer, for example, produced works of mythological subject-matter inspired in the 1950s Picasso, such as Parsiphae, (1956, in Dresden's Gallery of the New Masters).

⁷⁴⁸ In the words of the art critic Konrad Farner: 'In the existing conflict between figurative and abstract art, Italian Realism takes a primary position.' (See Konrad Farner, *Guttuso e Mucchi*, Vorwärts, Milan, 1959, quoted in Franco Russoli, op. cit., p. 38.

⁷⁴⁹ The prestige of the Italian 'realisti' became consolidated in the Socialist countries after Stalin's death in 1953 and the liquidation of international Zhdanovism. Already in 1954, Guttuso held two major exhibitions in Budapest and Prague and, in 1961, another one at Leningrad Hermitage and Moscow Puskin Museums. See Renato Guttuso in Marialivia Sereni, op. cit. (1972), p.p. 9-10.

⁷⁵⁰ Konrad Farner, 'Guttuso e Mucchi' Vorwärts, Milan 1959, reprinted in Franco Russoli, op. cit., p.38.

Diego Rivera and Ben Shan.⁷⁵¹ All these had employed a Modernist vocabulary in their painting, but only in so far as Modernist language served to express, in Konrad Farner's words:

'New forms that would correspond to new content –whereas the abstract artists... only reproduce the conditions of a society in decay and decomposition... ['Realisti'] art reflects today's Italy: This is not the Italy of the ruling class, or that of the bourgeois oppositional intellectuals, who are separated from the people and express their opposition in private and only apparently revolutionary terms... [Conversely, the Italian 'realisti'] contribute to changing the world in a positive sense... Precisely, in the opposite sense to the Abstract artists, who do not transform anything, but simply resist changes in reality in a static and negative way.'⁷⁵²

A politically positive reading of inter-war German culture had also been produced in the PCI press as early as 1947, when the Zhdanovian wave had not fully reached Italy yet. In an Il calendario del popolo entry on German Expressionist theatre, the movement was regarded as 'a reaction against Whilhemine mentality... After the tragic disillusion and horrible massacres of the [First World] War, Expressionism... directed its anxiety and will to rescuing humankind from the bloody phantom of war... When the war ended, the Expressionists became more interested in the conflicts inherent in sexuality

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Ibid., pp. 39-40. When comparing Mucchi with the Italian abstract artists, Cremer writes that he was not 'one of those bourgeois revolutionaries who reduce class struggle to sterile phraseology. Instead, as a Socialist artist, he proclaims the deeper sense of this struggle with all its consequences.' (Fritz Cremer, Preface to a Mucchi's exhibition at Berlin National Gallery, 1960, reprinted in Franco Russoli, op. cit., p. 41.)

and its social and revolutionary dimension... A common characteristic of the movement was its expression of an outrageous and desperate violence. German language was shaken and broken up. Bodies and souls were dominated by... a scream for liberation.⁷⁵³

Conversely, articles on politically correct German personalities, such as Brecht, contributed to counter-act the rhapsodic cultural politics of the Italian party press during Sereni's office. In turn, articles on Brecht defined bourgeois theatre as 'harmonious',⁷⁵⁴ and not as 'decadent', while German Socialist theatre was 'theatre of contrasts'.⁷⁵⁵ Moreover, Brecht was praised for his engaged attitude but, above all, for having said that: 'current theatre holds the public prisoner and hypnotised, instead of educating it';⁷⁵⁶ and having invited the audience 'to question everything that looks obvious and natural: He asks [the spectator] to look for the substance underneath the commonly accepted rules.'⁷⁵⁷

6.e. The Crisis of Realism.

The debate of the 1944-1947 years intended to reconcile modern art with Communist politics. Then, for the artists close to the PCI, it increasingly became clear that to achieve a social role meant comprehensively and deeply reviewing their own status as modernist intellectuals, and their ways of

⁷⁵³ Teatro espressionista, Il calendario del popolo, n. 28, January 1947, p. 13.

⁷⁵⁴ Luciano Lucignani, op. cit., p. 969.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Bertolt Brecht, quoted in Ibid.

⁷⁵⁷ Luciano Lucignani, Ibid.

relating to the whole of society. One of the most active theoreticians of the new role of the intellectual was Bontempelli. He explained in L'Unità that:

'In the second half of the century, Socialist propaganda was concentrated on the class interest of workers... At the same time, however, intellectuals were able to examine the progress made by this propaganda and the ideas being propagated. In so far as they were committed to humanist values, they were the people most capable of understanding the workers' movement. This was not because it was in the interests of their own class, but because it was the only tendency able to save humankind as a whole, that is to say, it makes possible the kind of social life that accords with the original dignity of man....'⁷⁵⁸

Statements such as these aimed to build bridges between intellectual evolution and political engagement. Artists such as Guttuso had managed to reconcile or, at least, to present in clear terms the dilemmas of Communist painting in a Modernist cultural environment. However, over-criticism on the part of sectors of the PCI hindered a profitable relationship with the rest of the artistic milieu. For example, Morlotti complained that Sereni had asked him to follow the example of the Vatican: 'Pius XII's followers are invading Italy with their little saints. Why don't you also make an effort to create figures which everybody can understand?'⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁸ Massimo Bontempelli, 'Un equivoco', L'Unità, 18 July 1948.

⁷⁵⁹ Ennio Morlotti, 'Morlotti spiega la crisi dei pittori,' Interview with Marco Fini in 'L'Europeo', 17 April 1975, in Nello Ajello, op. cit., p.249.

Morlotti had largely proved his commitment, but he rejected allowing his artistic practice to be guided by political exigency because, he thought, this would have lowered his work to the level of Pius XII's 'little saints'. However, the need to produce original complex idioms was too often overlooked by many 'realisti' because, for them, having a political effect took priority. In the best examples of the group, rather than anti-Modernism, this meant 'beyond-Modernism'. After all, what could these artists invent after fifty years of the avant-garde? The 'realisti' were not Modern in that sense, but in the sense of breaking with the established artistic environment and taking the workers as their audience and subject-matter. They were Modern in so far as they worked for the proletariat, which was a product of modernity, although it occupied the subaltern pole of the Modern dialectic. Giorgio Piovano, a poet linked to the 'movement, tells that:

'we were sick and tired of literary "rebellions", and wanted a real revolution in history and in social and political organisation, not only in rhymes and colours... The future belonged to the workers. They were, for us, the real protagonists of history. It was, therefore, natural that painters and poets made them the subjects of their art.'⁷⁶⁰

Paradoxically, however, in the context in which the 'realisti' moved, the production of formal advances was secondary from the point of view of achieving wide comprehensibility, but it was a political demand if they wanted to be respected within the art world. It was a fact that the support of the critics

⁷⁶⁰ Giorgio Piovano, 'Pittura e vita a Pavia nel secondo dopoguerra,' in Mario De Micheli, et al., Artisti realisti nelle campagne pavesi degli anni 50, Vangelista, Milan, 1984, p. 48.

and commercial success had consolidated the Abstract trends as the most prestigious examples of post-war Italian art, while the proletarianised art promoted by the Cultural Commission was being fiercely combated by the traditional artistic establishment. It looked, then, as if the Communists would have to coexist with the 'Bourgeois' artists for longer, and see if they could, at least, profit from their prestige, for the time being, and try and convince them to make politically explicit art in the future. As Morlotti's case shows, in practice, the wide Leftist association of Italian artists that the PCI intended to gather together again could not be based on the premises of the 'realisti'. Firstly, because the targeted future members had different interests and viewed this kind of party art as an attempt 'to put painting at the service of the slogan' and 'to offer absolution to those who would accept their forms as an illustration of things.'⁷⁶¹ Secondly, because the positive experiences of integrating mass communicability and the expressive arsenal of the avant-garde in the late 1940s did not continue.

Instead, the all-out defence of figuration as the only way to communicate with the masses too often underrated the workers' capacity to understand new idioms. Consequently, some works of art looked, at times, rather paternalistic and didactic, while, at other times, they seem naïve, and their voluntarism was insufficient to create a real pictorial language. De Micheli retrospectively remembers that 'above all, Realism was the result of an immediate and spontaneous identification with the people and the drive towards renewal

⁷⁶¹ 'Ennio Morlotti, op. cit. (1975), p. 249.

which originated in the values of the people's world... Its weakness was... naivety and uncalculated enthusiasm.'⁷⁶²

In addition, the reduction of subject matter to traditional peasant and proletarian motifs contrasted with the rapid growth of mechanised agriculture, the tertiary sector and the number of white-collar workers. In face of these new economic conditions and social subjects, the 'realisti's' so-called mass taste seemed rather obsolete. Nevertheless, De Micheli stresses that, together with the above reasons, the tendency to isolationism from contemporary social and aesthetic developments was the result of 'General ostracism organised against them. This made the movement isolate itself.'⁷⁶³

After the exhaustion of 'realismo', Negri perceives in these artists 'the recuperation of feelings, themes, interests that were earlier sacrificed to an over-restricted conception of the militant content of the Realist work.'⁷⁶⁴ Earlier, the 'realisti' did not want to paint for painting's sake any more, but to use painting to achieve their own ends of political action and social community. In Guttuso's words, after Fascism, 'history speeded up and we stopped thinking about painting. We had to do something else: We had to act.'⁷⁶⁵ They thought that this meant that they would have 'to see the Modern from an ever more Modern point of view.'⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶² Mario De Micheli, Artisti realisti nelle campagne pavesi degli anni 50, Vangelista, Milan, 1984, p. 5.

⁷⁶³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁶⁴ Antonello Negri, op. cit. (1994), p. 112.

⁷⁶⁵ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1949) (b), p. 12.

In 1956, however, Guttuso declared that to value art only from a political point of view was mistaken: 'I have stopped thinking that everybody who depicts a worker is a great painter. Now, I think that we have to depict these subjects well, because badly-made things don't convince anybody.'⁷⁶⁷ In a 1972 interview conducted by Marialivia Sereni, he added that producing works only for explicit political purposes was like 'volunteering to be castrated. Now, I think that this period called for prioritising some aspects of art over others... The experience finished for me in 1953... At that moment, I felt that I had paid my dues. I felt that I could take a break and so I did.'⁷⁶⁸

Retrospectively, since the second half of the 1950s, the split of the 'Fronte nuovo delle arti' was seen by Guttuso as a political mistake. Guttuso himself noted:

'The 'Fronte' divided into two antagonistic camps: those who wanted to "locate" themselves in the great currents of European "taste"; and those who wanted to found a Realist Italian painting. To achieve the latter we sacrificed an artistic tradition of considerable significance. That was an exclusionist point of view that lead us, unintentionally, to take a simplistic path of vague populism, "revivals"... and stylistic analogies. We ignored genuine artistic arguments on purpose.'⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁶ Renato Guttuso, 'Del realismo del presente e d'altro', quoted in Antonello Negri, op. cit. (1994), p. 114.

⁷⁶⁷ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1954).

⁷⁶⁸ Renato Guttuso in Marialivia Sereni, op. cit., p. 19.

⁷⁶⁹ Renato Guttuso, op. cit. (1955).

Similarly, Trombadori regretted that the PCI lacked the flexibility to avoid the sterile logic of confrontation that dominated the late 1940s and early 1950s. He acknowledged that 'it was a mistake not to create in the party's institutions the conditions in which both their tendency and ours could coexist.'⁷⁷⁰

After Realism, however, Left-wing Italian artists turned to more overtly Modernist streams, not without the feeling of having lost something on the way. Guttuso recalls that:

'That was the most unhappy period of my practice. It coincided with the abnormal development of the artistic market and my own market in particular. When I had time I read the catalogues of the art shows... and realised what a grotesque fair of useless things these were. I found in them bad literature and worse philosophy mobilised indiscriminately to back good and evil, truth and falsehood.'⁷⁷¹

The end of 'realismo' meant the end of a reaction against post-war Modern art conceived as a bourgeois cultural institution. Yet, the 'realisti' discourse about the overcoming of Modernism still aimed to become integrated in an enlarged category of art; and find a way out of the contradictions between the aesthetically and the politically progressive. In this respect, Guttuso's abandonment of 'realismo' meant more a defeat than an evolution.

⁷⁷⁰ According to Morlotti in Ennio Morlotti, *op. cit.* (1975), p.250.

⁷⁷¹ Renato Guttuso in Marialivia Serini, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

CONCLUSION

This thesis presents the reader with a reasoned corpus of empirical material on the policies of the Italian Communist Party towards the arts during the post-war period. The starting point of my research has been the perception of the cultural politics of the PCI as a relevant cultural fact in Italy. Its main success was its conscious attempt to overcome the polarisation between competing cold-war paradigms and integrate the developments of Modern art with Socialist Realist calls for artists' political engagement.

In this thesis, I make no attempt to distinguish 'good' from 'bad' art from the point of view of taste, because 'taste' requires a universal agreement which none of the Italian post-war artistic currents have achieved. I would argue, however, that a sympathetic consideration of the cultural policies of the PCI towards the arts, together with the increasing amount of historical data and artworks from the USSR and Eastern Europe, which have become available in the West in recent years, may lead to a rethinking of the corpus of what has hitherto been regarded as the canonical art of the period.

The questions raised by PCI cultural policies were deeply felt by artists in the period of post-Fascism and post-war reconstruction. The Primo and Secondo manifesto dei pittori e sculttori, or the Manifesto della nuova secessione italiana, which are characteristic texts of the Italian artistic situation in the mid 1940s, were issued in a climate of anti-Fascist fervour in which the way to integrate these questions seemed clear and straightforward.

Nevertheless, it soon became evident that not all artists who had joined anti-Fascism and the Left-wing parties at the end of World War II could succeed in articulating their art with long-term Communist politics, and accordingly transform themselves as easily as they had supported the anti-Fascist struggle. Such a task could not depend upon good faith; and much less upon a party decree. In the artists and intellectuals whom I have considered in this thesis, the integration of their political and cultural activities was more a matter of slow, subtle but intense individual processes which were both intellectual and personal.

The main limitation of the PCI's cultural politics was its inability to reconcile the claims of these artists with the party's political programme as the immediate post-war period went on. Italian Communist artists had regarded Picasso's Guernica as the first example of their new art. This painting had been a fairly successful attempt to reconcile Modernist aesthetics and Left-wing political concerns, but Communist Italian artists intended to go beyond it and substitute Guernica's sense of outrage by the complete articulation with the Communists' political programme. However, such an ambitious project of producing a great work of art beyond Guernica was never achieved. Instead, Communist artists tended to fall into regressive aesthetic positions. In practice, political concerns prevailed in them; and the consequence of the party's need to maintain links with its uneducated constituency was a need for an 'understandable' art. The technical corollary of this however, hindered the activity of these artists in the artistic field as such, and ultimately isolated them

so that, in artistic circles, they have often been regarded as not real artists at all but as mere illustrators of political policy.

Together with the 'realisti' majority, I have considered the alternative proposed by 'Forma 1'. These artists conceived revolutionary art as anti-ideology, that is: as criticism of conservative mental schemes. They accordingly produced complex works in which they put forward nodal problems on the relationship between knowledge, ideology and reality. However in this case, the resulting stress on formal radicalism circumscribed their questions within the exclusively artistic field. Their main weakness therefore became a political one linked to the question of popularity. One might argue that an art that surprises and consciously and polemically frustrates established expectations cannot be popular, but that it nonetheless remains a revolutionary and avant-garde art; and that its unpopularity is not its fault, but the result of it taking place in a society ruled by conventions and not by freethinking. The 'Forma 1' artists accordingly rejected 'familiarity' in art. But, precisely, for Communist culture, and in the conditions of any 1940s Left-wing political movement, 'familiarity' was the condition for an effective rapport with the workers; the only means by which they could establish a relationship with aesthetic products.

To sum up, If some 'realisti' Communist artists were qualitatively weak, other Modern artists left large parts of the potential audience, who could not understand their work, outside the channels of distribution of art. The former in effect exchanged aesthetic quality for political quantity whereas, in the confrontation with Formalist artists, the converse was the case. The

questions of popularity and avant-gardism in Italian art are beset by a series of historical dilemmas which never were really solved. Rather, they were overtaken by changes which occurred in society and the economy at large and in the composition of the working class. After the immediate post-war period, the spread of urban life and white collar workers, who were far more educated than conventional blue-collar workers and peasants, largely placed the question of popularity into the background of debates about the relationship of art with politics. In addition, new forms of mass communication, such as cinema and television, relativised the real political value of the fine arts. Once the immediate post-war period of reconstruction had passed, and social modernisation had really begun to have an effect in Italy, the ground of cultural-political struggle shifted. In the new mass culture, arguments about the rights and wrongs of 'high art' lost much of their political *raison d'être*. The PCI project of a politically conscious fine art passed into history.

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